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CAPONSACCHI

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CAPONSACCHI

A Play in Three Acts, Prologue and Epilogue, Based upon Robert Browning's Poem, "The Ring and the Book"

BY

ARTHUR GOODRICH and ROSE A. PALMER

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Foreword by
William Lyon Phelps

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Afterword by
Clayton Hamilton

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1927

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
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1929

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FOREWORD

Tennyson did not write for the stage until he was past sixty; but Browning wrote most of his plays early in life. "Paracelsus" was a poem and not a drama. As has often been said, it represented not character in action, but action in character. He knew perfectly well what he was about, for in the original preface (1835), afterwards suppressed, he wrote: "I have endeavoured to write a poem, not a drama; the canons of the drama are well known, and I cannot but think that, inasmuch as they have immediate regard to stage presentation, the peculiar advantages they hold out are really such only so long as the purpose for which they were at first instituted can be kept in view." The great actor, Macready, read "Paracelsus" with the tears running down his cheeks, and at a dinner party given that year at which both old Wordsworth and young Browning were present, Macready leaned across the table and asked Browning, "Won't you write a play for me and save me from going to America?" Of course the young poet was immensely flattered by this request and he wrote the play "Strafford," which Macready produced, but which is very far from being a good play. Browning continued to write plays of which the most famous is, perhaps, "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon," but none of them had any great success on the stage, and

owing to an unfortunate and melancholy quarrel with Macready, Browning definitely and finally abandoned his career as a playwright.

But although he stopped writing for the stage, he was, with the exception of Shakespeare, the most dramatic poet in English literature. It has often been said that Browning invented more plots than any other writer in history; and one of the motion picture magnates—I forget which one—said, "Robert Browning is the greatest writer for the movies who ever lived."

"The Ring and the Book," Browning's great epic, which was published in 1868-69, was actually put on the screen and I had the misfortune to see it. It was indeed a motion picture version, but however fine the intention may have been, the result was crude caricature.

But the possibilities of a dramatic version of this exciting murder trial were perceived by Rose A. Palmer, grasped instantly by Walter Hampden, and brought to fine fruition as true poetic drama by Arthur Goodrich. The result is the play "Caponsacchi," beautifully mounted by Claude Bragdon, and superbly acted by Walter Hampden, who, with an admirable company, delighted intelligent playgoers in New York throughout the theatrical season of 1926-27. This is a play, a tragedy, in which Browning's own lines, wherever possible, have been preserved; they are immensely effective when spoken with the intelligent and dramatic feeling that Mr. Hampden and his company

are able to give. This is not a drama that one attends from a sense of duty, like many intellectual dramas where the audience feel virtuous and bored at the same time, and are relieved when a disagreeable task is finally accomplished. The fact is that Mr. Goodrich, with the coöperation of a truly great actor, has produced an intensely exciting and deeply affecting play. There is not a moment of dullness from the beginning to the end, and the different scenes have been arranged with extraordinary skill. I regard this play as the chief event of the dramatic season in New York, and it is my hope that it will become a permanent feature on the American stage.

It is strange when we consider three things—first, that the glory of English literature is its poetry; second, that our greatest dramatist, Shakespeare, wrote his plays in verse; third, that the leading continental dramas of our time, "The Sunken Bell" and "Cyrano de Bergerac," are both in verse; it is strange, I say, that there has been no good modern English drama in verse until "Caponsacchi" appeared. It is difficult for the modern actor to give adequate value to the poetic drama on the stage; but it can be done as is proved by Mr. Hampden and his company.

I am very glad that this play is being published, as it deserves the permanent form of print, and it is my hope that all who have seen it, and many who have not, will read Browning's immortal story in this form and visualize it as they read.

William Lyon Phelps.

THE CAST

As directed by Mr. Walter Hampden at Hampden's Theater, New York

GIOTTI, MELCHIOR, ANDREA	Soldiers of the Papal Guard	*Anthony André, Marcel Dill, Gordon Hart*
MONTINI, Captain of the Papal Guard		*Louis Polan*
POPE INNOCENT XII		*Stanley Howlett*
GUIDO FRANCESCHINI		*Ernest Rowan*
CAPONSACCHI		*Walter Hampden*
TOMMATI, VENTURINI, SCALCHI	Judges of the Papal Court	*Hart Jenks, P. J. Kelly, Robert Paton Gibbs*
GHERARDI		*Dallas Anderson*
PIETRO COMPARINI		*J. P. Wilson*
VIOLANTE COMPARINI		*Suzanne Jackson*
POMPILIA, their daughter, and wife of Guido		*Edith Barrett*
CANON CONTI		*Cecil Yapp*
GOVERNOR OF AREZZO		*C. Norman Hammond*
ARCHBISHOP OF AREZZO		*Edwin Cushman*
MARGHERITA		*Marie Adels*
SALVATORE, Owner of a Puppet Show		*Howard Claney*
PEPPINA, His Wife		*Grania O'Malley*
INNKEEPER AT CASTELNUOVO		*William H. Sams*
HIS SERVANT		*Albert West*

THE CAST

MARINETTA ..... *Eudora Hunner*
GUARD AT CASTELNUOVO ..... *Tom Gomez*

DANCERS AT THE CARNIVAL: *Le Roi Operti and Miss Carroll Weller*

DUCHESSES: *Dorothy Scott, Eudora Hunner and Caroline Meade*

MESSENGER: *Peter Brocco*

FLOWER GIRLS, CITIZENS, PEASANTS, GUARDS, ETC.: *Hope Cary, Ruth Seward, Leland Wright, Eldon J. Lindermann, Richard Carewe, F. R. Colton, Howard Galt, Stuart Miller*

THE SCENES

PROLOGUE: A Court of Justice at the Vatican, February, 1698

ACT I. The Carnival, Arezzo. Eleven months earlier

ACT II. *Scene* 1. Caponsacchi's Cell, Arezzo. Six weeks later

Scene 2. Street outside Guido's Palace, Arezzo. Same evening

Scene 3. The Inn at Castelnuovo, near Rome. Three days later

ACT III. *Scene* 1. A Court of Justice at the Vatican. A week later

Scene 2. Pietro's Home, Rome. Eight months later

EPILOGUE: A Court of Justice at the Vatican, February, 1698

CAPONSACCHI

PROLOGUE

An afternoon in February, 1698.
A Court Room in the Vatican, Rome.

"While the same grim black-panelled chamber blinks
As though rubbed shiny with the sins of Rome
Told the same oak for ages—wave-washed wall
Against which sets a sea of wickedness."

The front three-quarters of the stage is the Court Room proper and is divided from a back ante-room by heavy curtains which are drawn aside at rise. This ante-room is raised a step or two above Court Room, and contains, at C.B., a large, throne-like chair.

In the Court Room proper are judges' chairs and desk on a raised platform at L. At R. and facing the judges is a large armchair and another of similar character is near the back, at C. This chair faces front. There is a window at B. in ante-room. Entrances to corridor, L. and at R.

At rise of curtain, off stage an organ is playing in the distance.

THREE SOLDIERS *are on stage. Standing in ante-room at B. looking out of window is* MELCHIOR, *thirty-five, immaculate, dandified, and at R.C. sitting in chair is* ANDREA, *young and dreamy.* GIOTTI, *forty, big, burly, overbearing, at C.*

GIOTTI

Fie, what a roaring month we've had, my friends,
Since came this murder, ripe on Christmas Eve!

MELCHIOR

I never knew the city so distraught. . . .
[*From off stage R., the murmur of the mob increases, and shouts of "Guido," "Hail, Guido," break through.*]

ANDREA

Nay . . . listen. . . .

MELCHIOR

Aye. The final hour has come.
They bring them hither from New Prison straight.

ANDREA

Guido and Caponsacchi?

GIOTTI

Can you see?

MELCHIOR

Aye.
[*As the shouts increase.*]
Hark you to the outcries of the mob.
Are they not all for Guido?

GIOTTI

There's a man
After my heart.

MELCHIOR

But look! See how the crowd
Threatens and jeers the other one, the priest!

GIOTTI

He's lucky if they do not drag him loose,
Tear him to bits, scatter his body-parts,
A ghastly show and warning to his like.

ANDREA

'Twas Guido, not the priest, this murder did.
Twenty-two dagger wounds he dealt her. He,
Guido, her husband. Her, his frail young wife.

MELCHIOR

[*Coming down.*]
Murder's not all. Guido was justified.

GIOTTI

The priest, the lover, he's the guilty one.

ANDREA

'Tis not for us to say. 'Tis for the Court.

MELCHIOR

Did he not steal away Count Guido's wife?
Did not this priest and Guido's wife two days
Together travel on the road to Rome?

GIOTTI

Where were they caught at last? A wayside inn.
One couch in one room and one room for both!
[*Laughs.*]

ANDREA

That's Guido's story. . . .

GIOTTI

[*Laughing ironically.*]
Oh, the pious priest!

MELCHIOR

[*Jeering.*]
The all-consoling Caponsacchi, sirs!

GIOTTI

The courtly Christian!

MELCHIOR

Friend of all the world!
[MELCHIOR *and* GIOTTI *roar together.*]

ANDREA

The law decides.

MELCHIOR

[*Argumentatively.*]
Nay, what is the good of law
In a case of the kind? None, you and I agree.
Call in law when a neighbor breaks your fence,
Touches the purse or pocket. . . . But woos your wife?
No, take the old way trod when men were men.

GIOTTI

[*Hotly.*]
If the law finds Count Guido guilty, sir,
Then I say in the name of all that's left
Of honor in Rome, civility in the world,
There's an end to all hope of justice more.

ANDREA

Either the Court must sentence Guido. . . .

MELCHIOR

No!

ANDREA

For killing thus his wife. . . .

GIOTTI

They would not dare!

ANDREA

Or they must turn to prosecute this priest. . . .

GIOTTI

Now that's more like!

ANDREA

In that he caused the crime.

MELCHIOR

[*To* ANDREA.]
I'll wager you Count Guido goes scot-free.

GIOTTI

And I. A month's pay.

MELCHIOR

Two months.

ANDREA

Done with both!

[*Enter L.* MONTINI, *Captain of Papal Guard, in uniform. The three on stage stiffen to attention and salute.*]

MONTINI

You, Giotti, swiftly march your men along
The corridor unto the outer gate.
Meet there the prisoners, escort them here.

[GIOTTI *salutes and marches* MELCHIOR *and* ANDREA *off stage L. As soon as they have gone,* MONTINI *crosses to R. entrance. With lowered voice and great reverence, speaks off.*]

Your Holiness, all's as you ordered.

[*The* POPE *enters R. He is very old, "six and fourscore years," and yet for all his bent shoulders and rather tottering step, the dignity of the office, and of the man is instantly visible and impressive.*]

POPE

Thanks.

[*He crosses to C.B. and the opening of the curtains.*]

You wonder, sir, why I, the Pope, am here?

[MONTINI *gives deferential denying gesture.*]

You wonder why Pope Innocent should hide,
Watch from the curtains this last final scene,
While none, not even the judges, knows I watch?

MONTINI

[*Humbly.*]
Your wishes, sir, are not for me to scan.

POPE

[*Indicating folio in his hand.*]
This testimony many times I've read.
It twists and turns until the mind, confused,
Gropes through a blur of deeds declared, denied,
Proofs that prove nothing, motives thrice obscure.
Did Guido murder? Had he fair excuse?
The wife Pompilia, was she false or true?
This priest a hero or a libertine?
No answer clear I find in all these facts
Which, printed, I have studied o'er and o'er.
And I, the Pope, am final judge of all.
[*Off stage the shouts for* GUIDO *grow louder.*]

MONTINI

Your Holiness can hear the people's voice.

POPE

The voice of reasonless, unreasoning Rome!
They scarcely know the facts that I read here,
The facts, I say, for I know not the truth.
The truth lies in the hearts of men, not here,
The hearts of men, yes, in their voices too,
And in their look, in all that human thing
That is themselves. This is the truth I seek!
For this I bade my judges grant to-night
This special hearing to the prisoners.
For this I hide me here, unknown, to watch

And listen while these two, caught unaware,
Guido and Caponsacchi, face to face,
Plead their own case. So shall I find perchance
The truth that lies embedded in these facts,
This multifarious mass of words and deeds.
[*Enters ante-room and sits in single, throne-like chair.*]
So close the curtains.
[*With upraised face.*]
May I learn the truth!

[*The* POPE *sits gazing upwards, as* MONTINI *hides him from view by drawing the curtains.* MONTINI *stands on stage within the Court Room as the curtains fold. The tramp of feet off stage is heard and the three judges, in their robes,* TOMMATI, VENTURINI, SCALCHI *file in from R.* TOMMATI *is pompous, shrewd, politician type;* VENTURINI, *sharp, acrid, tenacious, grim;* SCALCHI, *small, high-voiced pseudo-clever, self-conscious. They ascend the judges' platform and sit. Then enter from L.* COUNT GUIDO *led by* MELCHIOR, *and* CAPONSACCHI, *led by* GIOTTI.

GUIDO,

"A beak-nosed, bushy-bearded, black-haired lord,
Lean, pallid, low of stature yet robust"

is fifty years old, shrewd, furtive, sardonic.

"He wore the dress he did the murder in,
That is, a just-a-corps, of russet serge,
Black camisole, coarse cloak of barsican,
(So they style here the garb of goat's-hair cloth)
White hat and cotton cap beneath."

CAPONSACCHI *is thirty, young, frank, handsome, "the courtly canon."*

"Black his coat, buckled his shoes were,
Broad his hat of brim."
"Alive and alert, calm, resolute and formidable,
Not the least look of fear on that broad brow."
"Well-born, of culture, young and vigorous,
Comely too."

His shoulders are bowed, his eyes upon the ground. Even after he sits he remains in this same position, expressionless, dull, as if dazed by the accumulated tragedy of the past month. ANDREA *follows in from L.* GUIDO *sits in chair R. facing judges.* CAPONSACCHI *sits in chair, near C., facing front.*]

TOMMATI

[*Rises, and strikes with gavel.*]
The trial is complete. Now at its end
By special dispensation we permit
Your presence here, the privilege as well,
To speak each in his own behalf.

GUIDO

[*On his feet. Craftily.*]

My lords,
I was not warned of this, am unprepared,
While he, the priest. . . .

TOMMATI

Is unprepared as you.

GUIDO

But, being a priest, he's used to public speech,
Has me at disadvantage. . . .

TOMMATI

Sir, enough!

GUIDO

I crave your pardon. Since I know so well
Your justice, honor, wisdom. Am content.
[*Sits.*]

TOMMATI

At close the judges will their findings make
And forward to His Holiness, the Pope,
From whose decision can be no appeal.
[*Sits. Uses gavel.*]
The Canon Caponsacchi!
[CAPONSACCHI, *who has sat rapt in dreams, pays no attention.*]
Well?

MONTINI

[*At* CAPONSACCHI'S *side.*]
The Court
Addresses you.

CAPONSACCHI

[*As if dazed.*]
Addresses me? The Court?
[*Rises.*]
Good sirs, what would you?

VENTURINI

See, he scoffs at us.

CAPONSACCHI

You wrong me. All forgetting where I was
I lost myself in dreams.

SCALCHI

In dreams, forsooth!

TOMMATI

Come, come. We summoned you to answer us.

CAPONSACCHI

Answer you, sirs? Do I understand aright?
Have patience! In this grimy smoke from hell. . . .
So things disguise themselves. . . . I cannot see
My own hand held thus broad before my face
And know it again. Answer you? Then that means
Tell once again what I the first time told
Nine months ago. Tell that for telling which
I got a jocular piece of punishment,
Was sent to lounge eight months away, returned
To Rome a month ago in time to find
That she I helped nine months since to escape
Her husband, was retaken by the same
(I being disallowed to interfere,
For you and Law were guardians quite enough
O' the innocent, without a pert priest's help)
And that he has butchered her accordingly,
As she foretold, as I myself believed.

Therefore tell once again the tale! For what?
Men, for the last time, what do you want with me?
Is it to blame, condemn, or set me free?
What comes to me can matter little now.
My part is done. I want no more with earth.
Pompilia is not here. All's emptiness.
So ask me nothing since I'll answer naught.
My lords, deal with me as you will. Let me
Return to dreams of her.
[*Sits again, stares dreamily front.*]

VENTURINI

[*To* TOMMATI.]
Like this he's been
All month.

SCALCHI

[*To* TOMMATI.]
With covert sneers at us, the Court.

VENTURINI

He's had his chance.

SCALCHI

By silence proves his guilt.

VENTURINI

Gives ground for Guido's plea for clemency.

TOMMATI

[*Using gavel.*]
Count Guido Franceschini, the Aretine!

GUIDO

[*Rises, with crafty humility.*]
Long live the reverend Court!
[*Straightening arrogantly.*]
Few words I need,
A blunt and honest man. Thus I'll begin:
I killed Pompilia Franceschini, sirs.
I killed her father and her mother too,
But them in self-defense. . . .

TOMMATI

Confession full!

GUIDO

Confession? Yes. What would you have me do?
Did I not wed this common Roman girl,
Make her my Countess, give her name and place?
Was she not false to me, and with this priest?
Did I not catch them, aye, and let them go,
Looking for justice to the Law and you?
And you . . . you judged them guilty, punished them,
A kind of punishment, too mild, I thought.
Yet I accepted it. And then. . . .

TOMMATI

Yes . . . then?

GUIDO

My wife gave birth to son, who took my name.
A Franceschini? You know better, sirs.
But a Caponsacchi, oh, be very sure!
Yet then I hoped, believed it was my child

Who might turn hatred into love again.
And so with four good peasants from my farm,
Tried friends, I came to Rome on Christmas Eve,
Forgiveness in my heart. Knocked at her door,
And, entering, found her close within his arms,
This priest you had that very day set free.
Then I went mad. . . .

VENTURINI

Your four men, where were they?

GUIDO

Outside. Awaiting me. I was alone.
And facing four. Her father came at me
From right. Her mother, tiger-cat, from left.
I struck at them to save my life, no more.
The priest, meanwhile, all careless of their fate,
Had slipped away, brought back with him a crowd
Who overpowered me.

SCALCHI

All clear it seems.

GUIDO

Again I ask, what would you have me do?
Should I allow this common drab, my wife,
To sleep her sleep out in another's arms,
Nor disallow their bastard as my heir?
Was I to face forever this their child
First taught to laugh and lisp and stand and go
By that thief, poisoner and adulteress,
Pompilia? No.

CAPONSACCHI

He lies!

TOMMATI

Montini!

MONTINI

[*To* CAPONSACCHI.]

Sir!

You do offend the Court. Be silent so.

TOMMATI

[*To* CAPONSACCHI.]

You shall be heard again.

CAPONSACCHI

[*Grimly.*]

I shall be heard!

GUIDO

What did I do, if you but sum it up?
I struck the blow where you had granted guilt.
I am no monster, I am a mere man.
The Governor of my town knows and approves,
The Archbishop of my town knows and assists.
Give me my life, give me my liberty,
My good name and my civic rights again.
If you must punish, punish him, the priest—
The architect of all this sorry deed.
[*From outside as* GUIDO *ends, louder cries of "Guido, Guido!"*]

TOMMATI

[*To* VENTURINI.]
Sir, are there questions you would wish to ask
Count Guido?

VENTURINI

None, sir, save to say he had
Much provocation. Rome is on his side,
You hear its friendly outcries, sir.

TOMMATI

[*To* SCALCHI.]

And you?

SCALCHI

No question. Guilty of this deed he seems,
And yet the people find for him excuse.

TOMMATI

'Tis justice that we seek—not punishment.

VENTURINI

Punish Count Guido! Recognize instead
In the deed done a righteous judgment. True,
He killed—but laudably I say—his wife. . . .

CAPONSACCHI

And proved himself thereby the most reviled
Of cutthroats and a prodigy of crime,
As the woman he slaughtered was a saint,
Martyr, and miracle. . . .

SCALCHI

A saint forsooth!

VENTURINI

A miracle of lust and impudence!

TOMMATI

Silence, my lords. Let all in order be.
[*To* CAPONSACCHI.]
Well, priest, the Court will listen to you. Speak.

CAPONSACCHI

[*Rising.*]
Will you not still believe in lies, though I
Burn out my soul in showing you the truth?

TOMMATI

Proceed, sir. Tell your story of this crime.

CAPONSACCHI

My story of this crime? So be it, lords.
I'll tell it though it tear my heart in twain,
Tell it for her, Pompilia. Oh, good sirs!
A month ago she lived as you and I.
She saw and spoke and felt and listened . . . she,
The glory of life, the beauty of the world,
The splendor of heaven. . . . Well, sirs, does no one move?
Do I speak ambiguously? The glory, I say,
And the beauty, I say, and the splendor still say I,
Who, priest and trained to live my whole life long
On beauty and splendor solely at their source,
God . . . have thus recognized my food in her.
Oh, could I show you her, Pompilia! All

Her glory, beauty, truth. . . .
What is all this?
There, I was born, have lived, shall die . . . a fool!
This is a foolish outset; might with cause
Give color to the very lie of the man,
The murderer; make as if I loved his wife
In the way he called love. He is the fool there!
Is there no woman then with soul so high
To lift mere man above his baser self?
Is there no worship, only that of flesh?
How silent you all are! Forgive me, lords.
I will go on now. Does she need or not
That I keep calm? Calm I will try to be.
I'll make her story live. You, sirs, shall see
Rather than listen, watch rather than hear
The progress of her fate from that first eve
On which I met her.
[*The story begins and lights begin to fade.*]
It was Carnival,
In March, a short eleven months ago.
Arezzo, lord and tradesman, priest and poor,
Together joined in merry masquerade.
I, with the Canon Conti, for a lark. . . .
For I was young then, ah, how young I was! . . .
Together did we shuffle off black gown,
Daring discovery, the Archbishop's wrath,
Disguised ourselves as fortune tellers. So
Watch close, my lords, the color, music, dance.
'Tis Carnival, Arezzo, moonlight, joy. . . .

BLACK OUT AND CURTAIN

ACT ONE

Early March, 1697, eleven months previous.

The night of the Carnival at Arezzo. The action takes place in an open public pavilion which is the center of the Carnival celebration.

At back is balustrade elbow-high, and, beyond, the blue of an Italian night. At L.B. a platform (a few steps and a landing) leads off to what may be considered the main entrance at R.B. and to another at L.B. There are also at L.F. and R.F. entrances which lead in from the gardens and adjacent rooms off the pavilion. Except for a bench near R.F., the stage is bare of furniture. It is, however, a mass of color. Decorations festoon from the ceiling, entwine the balustrade and the heavy hand-rail along steps. Flowers are everywhere.

Before rise of curtain, dance music is heard, and at the rise the crowd of masqueraders in gay costumes comes rushing on, and so masses upon the stage that there is hardly room for the two dancers who at the moment are performing at C. At L.F. with the gaudy framework of a puppet show, SALVATORE *and* PEPPINA *disconsolately look on. They are a young couple, travel-stained, anxious, weary, unmasked. On the fringes of the crowd in front pass back and forth Flower Girls, girls with*

sweets, a vendor of wine, and a vendor of gold trinkets.

GHERARDI, *a young nobleman, very drunk, is swaying stupidly at B., a little aside from the fringe of the crowd, and beside him, in costume and masked, is a* COMPANION. *They come down as the dancers and the crowd drift on across and off L.*

GHERARDI

These dancers make a travesty of Art.

COMPANION

Ho, ho! Gherardi, turn you critic?

GHERARDI

Yes,
Agility's not grace—they're acrobats—
All legs and muscles,
[*Solemnly.*]
Sir, the use of legs
Is sorely out of joint—
[*Suddenly realizes what he has said, laughs immoderately.*]
A good phrase that!
[*Slaps* COMPANION *on back and roars with laughter.*]

SALVATORE

[*At L., to* PEPPINA.]
They'll soon be back. And when the dancing stops
Perhaps we shall have better luck at last.
Courage . . . !

PEPPINA

'Twill be our only chance.

SALVATORE

[*Hopefully.*]

'Twill come.
And money fit to pay our lodging, food. . . .

GHERARDI

[*At R.*]
Legs out of joint! Oh, I'm a wit, my friend.
Count Guido . . . heard you not my name for him?
I called him Bluebeard. . . .
[*Crowd and dancers come swirling on again from L.*]

SALVATORE

[*Banging on cymbals as dance ends C. and crowd applauds.*]

Here's the puppet show—
Prized by the people, known throughout the land—
Puppet-show Salvatore—fresh from Rome—
The puppet show!

GHERARDI

[*Fronting him, drunkenly.*]

One moment wait, my friend!
Last came from Rome the new and wealthy wife,
Arezzo's threadbare Bluebeard snatched for gold.

3RD DUCHESS

He means Count Guido—

IST MAN

Have a care, my friend.

2ND MAN

He's drunk—

IST DUCHESS

Nay, this is fun!

OTHER VOICES

Bluebeard! Bluebeard!!

GHERARDI

I have a name for her as good as his,
They call her Countess—Countess she is not!
The Puppet Countess!
[*Takes puppet from* PEPPINA *and waves it high.*]

3RD DUCHESS

[*Amid laughter.*]

Oh, that name will stick
Her life out.

IST DUCHESS

She will never live it down!

2ND DUCHESS

Ho, ho, the Puppet Countess—

IST MAN

Know you her?

2ND MAN

No man has seen her since she reached the town.

1ST MAN

Poor child—'tis said she's only seventeen!

3RD MAN

'Twill serve her right, ambitious gutter snipe,
To try to buy for cash a ladyship.

SALVATORE

[*Trying to get attention.*]
The puppet show! Come closer one and all!
The puppet show from Rome . . . !
[PEPPINA *slips inside the booth and begins to manipulate the puppets. The crowd is moving closer to the puppet booth when a messenger comes, breathless with running, to the landing at top of steps.*]

MESSENGER

Oh, ladies, sirs,
Arriving at the gates from off the hills
Have come the oddest, all-surprising pair
E'er graced a Carnival. I've run a mile
To be the first to tell you all the news.
They're fortune tellers!

VOICE FROM CROWD

Where?

ANOTHER VOICE

What hills?

ANOTHER VOICE

What gates?

MESSENGER

I'll lead you to them.

VOICE FROM CROWD

Aye, lead on, lead on!

[*Hurrying, dancing, shouting, the crowd rushes up steps, off stage, R.B., leaving the disconsolate* SALVATORE *and* PEPPINA, *the drunken* GHERARDI *and* COMPANION *and the three* DUCHESSES.]

SALVATORE

The puppet show!

[*By noise from the cymbals and by personal force he tries vainly to detain the crowd; turns to* PEPPINA.]

They're gone! And we shall starve.

PEPPINA

Come, Salvatore, bring the puppet booth.
We'll set it in the doorway just above,
To catch the crowd as they come streaming back.

[SALVATORE *picks up the booth, from which* GHERARDI *has been signaling to the* DUCHESSES, *and bearing* GHERARDI *along with it, deposits him on the floor at the* DUCHESSES' *feet, as with* PEPPINA, SALVATORE *exits. R.B. following crowd.*]

GHERARDI

[*Struggling, laughing, to his feet and crossing, with* COMPANION, *to L.*]

Bluebeard and Puppet Countess! You heard that?
To think such cleverness as mine must age—

That such a brilliant mind as I possess
Must wane and pass! How tragic for the world!
[*As* GHERARDI *is speaking* GUIDO *and the* GOVERNOR *enter up L., masked.*]

1ST DUCHESS

[*To the* GOVERNOR *who comes down.*]
Oh, sirs, have you seen Caponsacchi?

GOVERNOR

No.
The Canon graces not the Carnival.
He prays perchance within his cell.

1ST DUCHESS

No, No.
He must be here. He'd not desert us so.

2ND DUCHESS

He's hiding or he's playing prank.

3RD DUCHESS

He said
We'd never know him, he'd be so disguised.

GOVERNOR

A priest disguised? No. That he would not dare.

3RD DUCHESS

There's nothing he'd not dare.

2ND DUCHESS

He'll fool us all.
[*Starts to cross up, the other two following.*]

1ST DUCHESS

Perhaps he'll come as Count. . . .

2ND DUCHESS

Or peasant . . . !

3RD DUCHESS

Clown . . . !

1ST DUCHESS

We'll seek him elsewhere. There's no Carnival
Without our Caponsacchi.
[*Exeunt* DUCHESSES *up L.*]

GUIDO

[*Joining* GOVERNOR.]

Who's this priest? . . .
I've seen him walk the streets, tall, gaunt, head high. . . .

GOVERNOR

He's favorite of all the ladies. . . .

GUIDO

[*With nod and chuckle.*]

Ah!

GHERARDI

[*Who has watched from L. To* COMPANION.]
Whom have we here? My nose has lost its smell
Or 'tis Count Guido and the Governor.
[*Crosses and bows sweepingly to* GUIDO *and* GOVERNOR.]
Sirs, you are just too late.

GOVERNOR

Too late for what?

GHERARDI

The merriest of jests. The rabble roared
With laughter at Count Guido. . . .

GUIDO

[*Turning sharply.*]

What was that?

GHERARDI

[*To* COMPANION.]
I knew 'twas he.
[*To* GUIDO *and* GOVERNOR.]
What, know you not the tale?
How Guido nosed and found the money chests
Of this old pair in Rome, took daughter too,
Because she was the key to ope the chests
And let the golden flood pour over him.
And how he brought them to Arezzo. . . .

GUIDO

[*Threateningly.*]

Hold.

Enough.

GHERARDI

[*Laughing.*]

And how in one short month of time
They chide and bicker, jaw and claw and fight,
With this poor girl . . . she's scarcely more than child. . . .

The unoffending focus of their war.
Meanwhile Arezzo laughs.

GUIDO

[*Drawing sword angrily.*]
Ah, does it laugh?
[*Advancing on* GHERARDI.]
You dolt, you blackguard, scandal monger, ass!
You'll laugh no longer. . . .

GOVERNOR

[*Restraining him.*]
Come! No trouble here.

GHERARDI

[*Laughing.*]
But that's not all. The rumor spreads about,
The Comparini, parents of the girl,
They cry enough and hasten back to Rome
To guard the money they have left.

GUIDO

[*Struggling with* GOVERNOR.]
You lie!

GHERARDI

Fie, what a temper!

GOVERNOR

Aye, with reason too.
This man's Count Guido's friend, his closest friend. . . .

GHERARDI

Count Guido's friend! How can that be forsooth?
I did not know he had a friend—except
The Archbishop and our worthless Governor—

GOVERNOR

[*Angrily.*]
Begone, before I let him spit you through!

GHERARDI

All right, all right!
[*To* COMPANION.]
They do not like my wit.
No sense of humor. We will go to meet
The fortune tellers—
[*Leads way, swaying, up steps.*]

GOVERNOR

[*Calling after him.*]
But remember this:
Your drunkenness has saved you, nothing else.

GHERARDI

[*Turning at top of steps.*]
A man if drunk enough will tell the truth
He'd, sober, lie about—
[*With a low mocking bow.*]
Farewell, farewell!
Give your close friend—Count Guido—all my love!
[*Exit with* COMPANION *up R.*]

GUIDO

[*Unmasking.*]
You know this man?

GOVERNOR

His name's Gherardi, friend
Of Caponsacchi.

GUIDO

Oh, the ladies' priest!

GOVERNOR

It's true Pompilia's parents leave you?

GUIDO

No.
They cannot since I have their cash. They gave
It me. To hold it safe for them. 'Tis safe.
But not for them. For me.

GOVERNOR

[*Sitting on bench, unmasked.*]
You move too fast.

GUIDO

[*Angrily.*]
I cannot move too fast! To rid myself
Forever of this pair and of their girl,
Yet get and keep their money. All of it,
Not the slim slice they paid for dowry.

GOVERNOR

Nay.
'Twas quite a sum as I remember it.

GUIDO

A trifling sum compared to all the wealth
They've stored in Rome. I want that wealth, my friend.
I'll make them suffer till they grant it me.
If suffering's too slow, there's shorter course.
[*Lowered voice.*]
If they should die, their money flies from Rome
Straight to Arezzo. Why not some to you,
Arezzo's Governor?

GOVERNOR

If they should die!

GUIDO

Are they not old? Why should they longer live?

GOVERNOR

Have patience . . .

GUIDO

No. Myself I am not young.
I would be free, live out what's left of life
In peace and plenty.

GOVERNOR

And this girl, your wife?
She's beautiful. . . .

GUIDO

A beauty that I hate,
Soft, clinging, innocent, and tasteless, tame.
When but a boy I used to torture lambs.

I loathed the soft and gentle things. Just so
Do I hate her.
[PIETRO *and* VIOLANTE *have entered L.B. near end of speech.*]

VIOLANTE

[*To* PIETRO.]
I know that voice. 'Tis he.

PIETRO

[*Addressing* GUIDO.]
Count Guido. . . .

GUIDO

[*To* GOVERNOR, *who masks himself quickly.*]
Speak of devils and they're here.
The father and the mother of my wife.
[*Turning to the pair.*]
What would you?

PIETRO

Sir, to-night we start for Rome.

GUIDO

[*With a start, and to* GOVERNOR.]
The rumor's true. . . .
[*To them.*]
A quick decision this.

VIOLANTE

We're sick of brawling, caterwauling hate. . . .

GUIDO

'Tis as you will. And I shall weep no tears.

PIETRO

We wish the money which you hold for us.

GUIDO

Money of yours? You're jesting or you're mad.

PIETRO

Five thousand lira all in gold. . . .

GUIDO

I say
You're mad. Or, worse, you seek to plunder me.
[*Hand on sword.*]
Begone, before I lose my temper. . . .

PIETRO

Sir,
You owe it us.

GUIDO

I owe you nothing save
In hate. In that full measure will I pay.
[*Draws sword.*]
I'll fill your empty pockets with my sword.
If it should slip and prick the heart instead,
Remember that I warned you. . . .

PIETRO

[*Drawing* VIOLANTE *toward R.B.*]
We'll away,
Go seek the Governor, have justice done. . . .

GUIDO

[*Laughing to* GOVERNOR *as he drives them with sword.*]
The Governor! Go, seek him. If he fail . . . ?

VIOLANTE

[*As they exeunt R.B.*]
Then will we walk and beg our way to Rome.

GUIDO

[*Calling after them.*]
May cutthroats on the road dispatch you both!
[*Turning to* GOVERNOR.]
Too long I've held my hand. At Carnival
Bodies are found in shadowed places, dead,
No one the wiser. This has happened?

GOVERNOR

Yes.

GUIDO

And you could prove that I was close by you,
If crude suspicion hit at me.

GOVERNOR

I could
And will. But first of all be cautious.

GUIDO

Nay.
Leave that to me. . . .

GOVERNOR

There still remains your wife.

GUIDO

She in her turn. There'll be no rest for me
Until these three are blotted from my road.
[*Exit L., as the sound of returning crowd is already heard off back. They now come rushing on stage, down steps bearing in their midst two motley Figures—fully masked—one, tall and thin—one short and fat. The Tall One* (CAPONSACCHI) *carries a cello. The Short One* (CONTI) *carries a flute. Both are dressed in motley with brilliant colored patches upon dark tights and doublets.*]

VOICES FROM CROWD

The fortune tellers—give them room—give back—

IST MAN

[*After crowd is on.*]
Who are these fellows?

CAPONSACCHI

[*Who has squatted upon lowest step and poised the bow of his cello.*]

Then you know us not?
I am the daybreak peeping gently forth
Over the brow of this high mountain top—
[*Bangs side of cello as he cranes his neck over top.*]
And this is your old friend—the man in the moon!
[*Points at* CONTI.]

CONTI

[*Laughing, rubbing his fat sides.*]
The man in the moon—the full round moon!

GHERARDI

I say
They're frauds.

CAPONSACCHI

What is a fraud? I'll tell you, sir.
A man who has no character himself,
Yet spends his little life with clever words
Scarring the characters of greater men.
[*In applause and confusion which follows, he plays on the cello.*]

GOVERNOR

They bring disgrace upon the Carnival.

CAPONSACCHI

[*Bowing.*]
The King of Rags,
[*Pointing to* CONTI, *who bows.*]
The Duke of Patches feel
All gratitude for this warm welcome from
The Knave of Clubs—
[*Again he plays as the maskers laugh and applaud.*]

VOICE FROM CROWD

He thrives on quick retort.

OTHERS

[*Point at* CONTI.]
The man in the moon!
[*Roar*]

GHERARDI

Whence come this merry pair?

CAPONSACCHI

[*The crowd plays this with him throughout, afraid to have his hand touch them, awed, amused and incredulous in turn. Especially in stanzas 3 and 4 all of those picked out show how accurately he knows and how closely he hits. And in the last stanza the crowd changes with him from shrinking fear to laughter.*]
Fortune tellers from the hills!
All your future joys and ills
We can touch and taste and smell and see and hear.
Touch us. Turn you cold or hot?
Then you're evil—or you're not.
Listen—heart-beats, hopes, and horrors, in our ear!

And our noses sniff and smell
Sweets of heaven, gall of hell.
Tongues we have that taste your smiles and salty tears.
What's the question you would ask?
Can we see behind your mask?
Aye, behind your mind and soul, beyond the years!

What! You're scoffing at our pow'r?
[*Touches one of crowd with cello bow.*]
You'll return within an hour
All the candle-sticks and silver things you stole.
[*Warningly at girl.*]
Once too many times, my lass,
Will you flirt with him at Mass.
[*Points with bow at* 2ND MAN.]
As for you, beware the lady with the mole!

[*Points with left hand at* 3RD MAN.]
You will win a captain's grade.
[*Nudges fourth with bow.*]
You will wed a blonde young maid.
[*Left hand indicates* 2ND GIRL.]
Keep away, my dear, from houses numbered seven.
[*Touches* 5TH MAN *with bow.*]
You will come to great success—
And will wish that it were less.
[*Left hand on* PRIEST'S *shoulder.*]
You, Franciscan! You are justly sure of heaven.

[*With swift change to hollow voice, stooped figure and reaching, creeping fingers.*]
Fangs of snakes and dust of roads,
Ooze of worms and tongues of toads,
Mixed at midnight when the lightning strikes and kills.
This our magic charm achieves.
[*Breaks tension with roar of laughter.*]

We are liars, braggarts, thieves,
Ragamuffins! Fortune tellers from the hills!

CONTI

[*As the laughter and applause of the crowd die down.*]
Who'll be the first to have his future read?

SALVATORE

No fortune could be worse than this we have.

CAPONSACCHI

Have patience. You shall wallow yet in wealth
Within an hour—

SALVATORE

Will we have food and drink?

CAPONSACCHI

[*Nods.*]
And royal place to sleep for many nights.

SALVATORE

[*Seizing* PEPPINA *joyfully.*]
Peppina, hear you that?

GHERARDI

Come, try me next.

CAPONSACCHI

Some day you will be sober.
[*Laughter from crowd.*]

1ST DUCHESS

What of us?

CAPONSACCHI

[*Seeming to think deeply.*]
You seek a priest, a canon of the church,
His name is Caponsacchi or the like,
A threadbare poet, whose success is this—
He knows himself a failure.

GOVERNOR

Excellent!
A true description—you have gifts, my friend,
Such gifts I'd have you tell *my* fortune.

CAPONSACCHI

You!
You have by many tricks attained a place
Far higher than your merits. Best take care
Lest folk discover you for what you are.

GOVERNOR

[*Angrily.*]
I'll make you pay for this. I'll have you jailed,
Miscreant, liar—
[*As crowd laughs, exits up L., shaking fist.*]

CAPONSACCHI

Well, who's next in turn?
[*From R. enter* PIETRO *and* VIOLANTE.]

CONTI

Whom have we here?

PIETRO

We seek the Governor.

And Justice.

CAPONSACCHI

Then you seek in vain. These two—
Justice, Our Governor—have never yet
Been found together.
[*Crowd laughs.*]

VIOLANTE

Gone is our last hope.

CAPONSACCHI

You're strangers here?

PIETRO

The parents of the wife
Of Guido Franceschini. Friends, forgive.
The money that we brought Count Guido holds,
Nor will he give it back. Yet we must go
To Rome, whate'er the hardships of the way.

VIOLANTE

But her, Pompilia, her we leave with him.
No, no! We cannot go!

PIETRO

We cannot stay.

GHERARDI

[*Laughingly to* CAPONSACCHI.]
Come, prophesy, you fortune-teller pair,
Will they reach Rome?

CAPONSACCHI

My prophecy is this—
They'll ride by swiftest horse, and guarded well.

GHERARDI

But how?

CAPONSACCHI

Arezzo's common heart is kind.
Good lady, spread your skirt to catch the flood
Of golden kindness from Arezzo's heart,
And I'll begin—
[*Takes purse from belt and throws it to* VIOLANTE.]
Come, friends, 'tis Carnival.
[*Coins begin to drop in* VIOLANTE'S *skirt and cries of approval come from the crowd as they contribute.*]
Well do I know you. See, there's food and drink,
As well as carriage for the road to Rome.

PIETRO

[*Proudly.*]
I've money, sirs, much property at home,
You all shall be repaid.

CAPONSACCHI

We want it not.
[*Chorus of approval from crowd.*]

[*Enter* ARCHBISHOP *at top of steps B. He is portly, middle-aged, pompous, well meaning.*]

PIETRO

Let me repay, I beg

CAPONSACCHI

Enough, send it
To Caponsacchi for Arezzo's poor.

PIETRO

Come, Violante.
[*Bowing as he and* VIOLANTE *exeunt L.*]
Sirs, God bless you all.
[GUIDO *sifts through the crowd and exit L., following them, covered by crowd's turning to the* ARCHBISHOP, *who comes down.*]

ARCHBISHOP

Heard I the name of Caponsacchi, sirs?

CONTI

[*Aside to* CAPONSACCHI *at R.*]
'Tis the Archbishop. Looks for you. We're lost.

ARCHBISHOP

I've news for him, news of preferment high,
Arezzo's loss, alas, but Rome's glad gain.

GHERARDI

He goes to Rome?

2ND DUCHESS

Nay, sir, but must it be?

2ND MAN

We need him here.

1ST DUCHESS

Arezzo needs him—

OTHER VOICES

Aye!

CAPONSACCHI

This Caponsacchi goes to Rome?

CONTI

Be still.
Else he will know you quick, and so know me.

ARCHBISHOP

I've sought him everywhere most anxiously.
His cell is empty. This is strange, most strange.

CONTI

May God forbid he learn how strange it is!

GHERARDI

Now, fortune teller, where's the Canon, come!
[*The crowd choruses approval and turns to* CAPONSACCHI.]

CAPONSACCHI

The Canon? Go you to the entrance hall.
There will he enter soon, this priest you seek.

ARCHBISHOP

Then he is safe?

CAPONSACCHI

Quite safe and well, my lord.

2ND MAN

Let's go and meet him. . . .

3RD DUCHESS

Aye, and cheer him loud
When he shall get this news. . . .

1ST DUCHESS

That breaks our hearts!

[*Crowd rushes up steps and off. All exeunt except* CAPONSACCHI, CONTI, SALVATORE, PEPPINA, and, *pausing on steps,* GHERARDI.]

CAPONSACCHI

[*To* SALVATORE.]
Make haste, set up your puppet show, my friend,
They'll wait a quarter hour, I promise you.
Make you the most of it.

SALVATORE

Good sir, you bless
Each one you meet.

[*Exit hurriedly with* PEPPINA, *following crowd.*]

CAPONSACCHI

Except myself. Farewell.

GHERARDI

[*Coming down excitedly between* CONTI *and* CAPONSACCHI.]
Zounds! Now I guess it. Caponsacchi's self!

CAPONSACCHI

"Some day you will be sober."

CONTI

Never that!
Gherardi sober, world would come to end!

GHERARDI

[*Arm about* CONTI, *who unmasks.*]
And Conti too! I should have known that shape . . .
[*Hands making globe.*]
That planetary shape that doth revolve
Round Caponsacchi as its pole. . . .

CONTI

You're wrong.
I am his shadow.

GHERARDI

[*Laughing, turns to* CAPONSACCHI, *who has paced down to bench, and sits there, unmasked.*]
Canon, hear you that?

CONTI

Nay, he hears nothing. He is thinking deep.
[*Stoops beside* CAPONSACCHI, *hands on knees.*]
What do you think?

CAPONSACCHI

[*With sigh.*]
This promised move to Rome.

CONTI

How dared you brazen the Archbishop so?

For me, my shanks are trembling yet. Had he
But guessed that you were you and I were I,
Short shrift we'd had. You go to Rome? Forsooth,
You'd go to penance and to fast. No more.

CAPONSACCHI

I wonder why they made me priest at all.
And now I go to Rome. No poorer priest
E'er dodged his duty, or played pranks instead,
Yet, I am chosen for preferment! Oh,
A topsy-turvy world, good Conti mine!

CONTI

[*Winking at* GHERARDI.]
A goodly world for aught that I can see.

GHERARDI

[*Winking at* CONTI.]
While wine lasts 'tis an effervescing world!

CONTI

'Tis but a mood.

GHERARDI

[*To* CONTI.]
He leaps from gay to grave
As leaps a mountain goat from rock to rock.
[*Laughs.*]

CONTI

[*To* GHERARDI.]
Or as a frog from lily pad to pad.
[*Roars.*]

CAPONSACCHI

[*Rising with mock severity.*]
A goat?

GHERARDI

I said not that.

CAPONSACCHI

A frog?

CONTI

No. No.

CAPONSACCHI

[*Catching them by necks.*]
I might decide to leap from neck to neck!

CONTI

[*To* GHERARDI, *as* CAPONSACCHI *holds them.*]
We'll let him choke us.

GHERARDI

[*Nodding.*]
Since he's gay again.

CAPONSACCHI

What made you of the story of the Count,
This Guido whom I've yet to meet?

GHERARDI

All true.

CONTI

I know him well, a cousin he of mine—
I make no boast! I met his fair young wife
And I so pitied her—

CAPONSACCHI

[*Breaking in.*]

You prompt forgot!
Your genial mind sloughs off unpleasantness
As if it were disease.

CONTI

Why not, in faith?
When sun is bright, why seek the shadows? No.

GHERARDI

Give me your duchesses. How sweet their wrath
When you scoffed at yourself to-night?

CONTI

Would I
Could win devotion such as theirs to you!

CAPONSACCHI

[*To* CONTI.]
I'll tell you a secret—

CONTI

Aye—

CAPONSACCHI

You're much too fat.

GHERARDI

I pay them all attention. You ignore—

CAPONSACCHI

[*To* GHERARDI.]
Another secret—that is woman's way.
They like me since they interest me not.
[*Enter from L., running,* PIETRO *and* VIOLANTE.]

VIOLANTE

Oh, sirs, protect us!
[CAPONSACCHI *and* CONTI *mask quickly.*]

PIETRO

Following us close . . .
A man . . . black-cloaked . . . he means us ill. . . .

VIOLANTE

I faint!

CAPONSACCHI

[*Catching her.*]
Gherardi, go with them, find horse and stage,
And start them off for Rome—

GHERARDI

[*Supporting* VIOLANTE, *leads* PIETRO *up steps.*]
Come on, old pair!
Leave all to me.

CONTI

[*At R., whispers.*]
He's at their heels!
[*Enter* GUIDO.]

CAPONSACCHI

[*Bowing to* GUIDO.]

Good sir,

You seem in haste. . . .

[*Exeunt* GHERARDI, PIETRO, VIOLANTE.]

GUIDO

'Tis my affair, not yours.

[*Starts up stage in pursuit.*]

CAPONSACCHI

[*Blocking his way.*]

I would have words with you.

GUIDO

I want no words

With you or any one. Out of my way!

CAPONSACCHI

[*Pointing to R.*]

Your way lies here.

GUIDO

My way lies where I wish.

CAPONSACCHI

[*Pointing to L.*]

No. Here!

GUIDO

[*Throwing himself on* CAPONSACCHI.]

You would prevent me?

CAPONSACCHI

[*Wrestling with him.*]

Since I must.

CONTI

[*Dancing about, uncertain.*]
Oh, sirs! Good sirs!
[*Aside to* CAPONSACCHI.]
I'll trip him if you like.

CAPONSACCHI

Nay, 'tis a tussle I enjoy. No tricks!

GUIDO

I'll show no mercy.

CAPONSACCHI

Mercy ask I none.
Now yield! I would not break your back. 'Tis well.
[GUIDO *lies where* CAPONSACCHI *has forced him down.*]

CONTI

A lovely brawl!

CAPONSACCHI

Sit on him, Conti, while
I go make sure his prey is out of reach.
[*Hurries up R.*]

CONTI

[*Calmly sitting on* GUIDO'S *middle.*]
Weight has its uses, placed on diaphragm.

[*Waggling finger at prostrate* GUIDO.]
Pant not so hard. You make me rise and fall
Like seasick sailor on a storm-tossed boat.

GUIDO

Intruding dolt! These folk are kin of mine . . .
I love them well, and followed them that I
Might give them gold and help them on their way.

CONTI

[*Staring at* GUIDO.]
They're kin of yours! Oh, Fates, what have we done!

CAPONSACCHI

[*Who returns.*]
They're safe from capture, well-companioned too.
Release him, Conti. . . .
[*Leans over to help* CONTI *up.*]

GUIDO

[*Throws* CONTI *off and rises.*]
Conti called you him?
Then who are you?
[*With free hand he snatches the mask off* CAPONSACCHI'S *face.*]
I like to know my friends.
Ah, 'tis the priest, the very well-known priest!
In motley too! What would the Archbishop say?
I'll go to him at once, have you unfrocked;
Or better I'll retain the news awhile
And use it only when 'twill harm you most.

CONTI

Good cousin Guido!

GUIDO

So you know me now?

[*To* CAPONSACCHI.]
You'll hear from me again, my pretty priest!
[*Exit R.U.E.*]
[CONTI *and* CAPONSACCHI *stand silent for an instant.*]

CAPONSACCHI

[*Lightly.*]
So this was Guido!

CONTI

[*Glumly.*]

Worser enemy
Dwells not in Arezzo.

CAPONSACCHI

Bah, it matters not.

[*Laughs.*]
Ah, Conti. What a sight you were to see,
Your ton of weight upon his middle.

CONTI

Nay.
Would I had been a rock to squash him quite.

CAPONSACCHI

Poor girl!

CONTI

What girl?

CAPONSACCHI

Count Guido's fair young wife.

CONTI

What an enigma you!—At once you scorn
The duchesses; protect this ancient pair
At risk of your career; then waste your time
In pity for a woman all unknown;
Plan not at all how to protect yourself!

CAPONSACCHI

Nay, I'll protect myself. 'Tis time we fled.
[*Urging* CONTI *toward L.*]
We'll slip out back door, creep along side street,
So to the cloister where we change, become
Two worthy canons innocent of harm,
Who, dull with learning, come to blink their eyes
Before the bright lights of the Carnival.
[*Exit laughing,* CONTI *with him.*]
[*Almost at once, enters R.U.E.,* GUIDO *clutching* MARGHERITA *roughly.*]

GUIDO

Now, Margherita, we're alone. Your news?
Why come you here?

MARGHERITA

[*Who is thirty, brazen, cynical, physically attractive.*]
Your lady has escaped.

GUIDO

Pompilia gone? But where?

MARGHERITA

I do not know.
She found somehow the key that I had hid
And vanished while my back was turned.

GUIDO

You fool!

MARGHERITA

You turn her desperate. Even gentlest souls
Are brave at bay. So blame not me, my lord.

GUIDO

She may be gone with them. If that be true
My grip upon their gold is loosened. No!
She's somewhere here. And when I have her back
I'll twist her body, as she twisted key,
Until her soul is half released to Hell.
[*Catching* MARGHERITA'S *arm.*]
Go, Margherita, sift through yonder crowd
That seethes and shouts about the puppet booth;
Find her! For your remissness make amends.
[*Exit* MARGHERITA *up R.* GOVERNOR *has entered up L.*]
Well met, my lord. This devil's brat, my wife,
Has slipped from out my palace, closely barred;
Is lost and must be found, lest all be lost,
Including all that share I promised you.

GOVERNOR

I'll search the farther rooms.
[*Points L.*]
Meanwhile you scan
The gardens. Quietly! No gossip stir!
Success or failure, join me here anon.

GUIDO

Until I seize her, I will quiet be.
[*Exit L.* GOVERNOR *R.*]
[ARCHBISHOP *enters up R., comes down steps. From up L.* POMPILIA *comes running, following him. She speaks when* ARCHBISHOP *is in front of bench, R.*]

POMPILIA

My Lord Archbishop!

ARCHBISHOP

No, I told you once
I could not listen to you here.

POMPILIA

My lord,
I have escaped for this: to search you out.
Oh, sir, to me a Bishop stands for God,
And I have need of God, so need of you.

ARCHBISHOP

Who are you?

POMPILIA

I'm Pompilia, wife, alas,
Of Guido Franceschini.

ARCHBISHOP

Guido's wife!
My lady, never had I seen you. Pray,
What can I do for you—for Guido's sake?
[*Sits on bench.*]

POMPILIA

For Guido's sake, aye, for his sake and for mine.
Our marriage, sir, no marriage is at all.

ARCHBISHOP

No marriage? Daughter, then you live in sin?

POMPILIA

In deepest sin, since love was never there.
Oh, sir, I know not what to do alone,
I'm still a child, my parents both have gone.
Place me within a convent, oh, I beg.
[*Kneeling.*]

ARCHBISHOP

A convent?

POMPILIA

There is one thing Guido claims
He has no right to ask nor I to give—
We being in estrangement soul from soul.
He loves me not, yet he demands my flesh
To rend and leave just fit for Hell to burn.
Then in God's name, for Guido's soul's own sake,
Imperiled by polluting mine, I say
I did resist. Would I had overcome!

ARCHBISHOP

My daughter, child indeed you are. Be calm,
Cleave to your husband. All will settle so.

POMPILIA

Cleave to him when he loves me not? Loves me!
I tell you that my maid, his servant there,
Named Margherita—she's his mistress, sir.

ARCHBISHOP

[*Rises.*]
'Tis scandal now. Against Count Guido, too.
Wise wives hide scandal, win their husbands back.

POMPILIA

Oh, sir, I am afraid, he threatens so—
Threatens with word, with blow, with curse, with sword.
I am so young, I do not wish to die.

ARCHBISHOP

Alas, a Bishop is but merely man
And often hardly that, such quandaries
The world demands that only he dissolve.

POMPILIA

[*Seizing his cassock as he crosses.*]
At seventeen, still playing oft with dolls,
I had no notion what a husband meant.
Then sudden I was hurried through a storm,
One dark eve of December's deadest day,
To San Lorenzo Church and up the aisle,

My mother keeping hold of me so tight
I fancied we were come to see a corpse.
I heard the heavy church door lock out help
Behind us. For the customary warmth
Two tapers shivered on the altar. Then
Came Guido, caught my hand and there was I,
O' the chancel, and the priest had opened book,
Read here and there, made me say that and this
And after, told me I was now a wife.

ARCHBISHOP

Ah, all was regular!

POMPILIA

It later proved
My mother, overwon by Guido's place,
Had planned this thing, my father knowing naught
And I began to half surmise the truth.
Something had happened, low, mean, underhand,
Whose one solution was that I succeed,
Struggle for happiness for them, for him,
This have I done. I've struggled, sir, and failed.

ARCHBISHOP

One way and only one I see for you,
Once back at home make Guido love you so
He'll aye be kind and seek no mistress more.
Farewell, my lady, do your duty plain.

POMPILIA

And if I tell you I am penniless,
That he has taken all my jewels—

ARCHBISHOP

That
Is civil case. Go seek the Governor.
[*As* POMPILIA *turns away hopelessly.*]
I'd not be hard. I've much upon my mind.
[GOVERNOR *re-enters.*]
But look. 'Tis providential. Good my lord,
This lady seeks you, has a plea to make.
With you I leave her, of your wisdom sure.
[*Exit R.*]

POMPILIA

[*Crosses to* GOVERNOR.]
Oh, sir, you stand for Justice, Law and Right.

GOVERNOR

My lady, 'tis high compliment indeed
That you should come to me.

POMPILIA

Hear me, I beg.

GOVERNOR

Will you return in short ten minutes' time.
Till then I'm busy with affairs of State.
I'll meet you here.
[*Indicates bench.*]

POMPILIA

I shall be here, my lord.

[*Exit slowly R.*]

GOVERNOR

[*Crosses swiftly to L. calling.*]
Guido! Guido!
[GUIDO *enters up L.*]

GUIDO

I've searched beyond in vain.

GOVERNOR

Your wife, Pompilia, will be here and soon.

GUIDO

You jest!

GOVERNOR

Come seeking me, find you instead.

GUIDO

Now are you friend as never friend before.
[*Catches* GOVERNER'S *arm, lowers voice.*]
Her parents have escaped, but she remains.
Suppose this girl-wife, tortured, terrified,
Should seek out some good man to shelter her.
She's not ill-favored nor deformed. Some man
Might fall in love with her. Save her from me,
The wretch who spoils her life. . . .

GOVERNOR

What good is that?
You are not free of her while yet she lives.

GUIDO

Why should she live? Would I not have the right
To kill her and her lover, gain thereby

Approval from all good and lawful men?
A Count, I stand for honor and the home!

GOVERNOR

You're very clever—but forget one thing.
First find the lover. . . .

GUIDO

[*Breaking in.*]
Nay, what stir is this?
[*Noise from off R.B., already begun, grows.*]

1ST VOICE OFF STAGE

All hail to Caponsacchi!

2ND VOICE OFF STAGE

Give them room!

3RD VOICE OFF STAGE

Arezzo's Canon. . . . Favorite of all!

GOVERNOR

You'd think it was some conqueror. 'Tis well
For husbands that he leaves Arezzo.

GUIDO

When?

GOVERNOR

As soon as Lent is over.

GUIDO

Time enough!

[*They exeunt down L. as* ARCHBISHOP *enters up R., followed by* CAPONSACCHI, *who is now dressed as*

priest. Crowd appears at R.B. and R. CONTI, *also in gown, enters, stands up R.*]

ARCHBISHOP

[*To crowd.*]
In short six weeks he goes to Rome, but now
I've counsel for him.
[*Comes down C.*]

CAPONSACCHI

[*To crowd.*]
Ere I go, I'll see
You all to thank you for your friendliness.
[*Crowd, cheering, disappears, leaving only* CONTI, *up R.*]

ARCHBISHOP

[*To* CAPONSACCHI.]
Here is my counsel. Ponder o'er it well.
Rome's the eternal harbor, make for port.
Crowd sail, creak cordage, and your cargo be
A polished presence, genteel manner, wit
At will, and tact at every pore of you.
We bring God's message but we deal with men.

CAPONSACCHI

I'll strive, sir, to obey.

ARCHBISHOP

But one thing more,
We deal with women also. Have a care.
'Tis on this rock that danger breaks most high.

CAPONSACCHI

If vows were naught, and vows are much to me,
I'd fear not danger from this source, my lord.
No woman as a woman, I can say
Has ever drawn my second glance—

ARCHBISHOP

'Tis well.
Be cautious, think of honor first of all.
You will go high if I mistake you not.
[*Exit* ARCHBISHOP *L.*]

CONTI

I listened. Platitudes that sound profound.

CAPONSACCHI

A genteel manner. Wit. Be cautious too!
And not a word of serving God and man,
One's self forgotten in the greater cause.

CONTI

Nay, quarrel not. You're hard to satisfy
As is my appetite. I'm hungry now.
Come, let's be off and celebrate with food.
[*Crossing to L.*]

CAPONSACCHI

You guzzling gourmand, let your stomach rest.
[*Dreamily, as he follows* CONTI.]
I wonder where we'll be this time next year.

CONTI

I in Arezzo—you in Rome, of course.
I rolling on dead level, hearing how
You climb aloft—
[*Rubbing his paunch, woe-begone.*]
I was not made to climb.

CAPONSACCHI

The fortune tellers! Just as well, no doubt,
We cannot see the future.

CONTI

Look who comes!
[*As* POMPILIA *enters R., her head bowed. They are at extreme L.B.*]

CAPONSACCHI

The lady young, tall, beautiful, strange and sad.

CONTI

[POMPILIA *sits on bench R.C.*]
Is she not fair? It is Count Guido's wife.

CAPONSACCHI

She's like a Raphael—

CONTI

Pocket full of gold,
'Twas that our lovely Guido sought her for,
Nay look, I'll make her give you back your gaze.
[*He throws a handful of confetti which falls at* POMPILIA'S *feet. She looks up and into* CAPONSACCHI'S *eyes.* GUIDO *enters at back.*]

Hello, there's Guido, the black, mean, and low,
Bends his brows on us—
[*As* CAPONSACCHI'S *gaze never wavers.*]
Prudence, for God's love!

GUIDO

[*Coming down.*]
So now the second time we meet, my priest.
This time I catch you making soulful eyes
At this my wife—
[*He catches her arm roughly.*]
Come home, you baggage, come.
[*To* CAPONSACCHI.]
And if you dare to darken once my door,
Seeking this lady whom you stare at so,
I'll find the sword will give you final pause.
[*Exit R., dragging* POMPILIA *whose gaze has never left* CAPONSACCHI *during the scene.*]

CAPONSACCHI

To-night, forever, shall that gaze endure,
Burn to my brain as sunbeam through shut eyes.

CONTI

What's happened to you that you stare and stare?

CAPONSACCHI

That man her husband, crafty, brutal, mean!
Beauty and beast in holy wedlock joined!
Such sacrilege must end! Come, Conti, come!
[*He starts toward R.*]

CONTI

[*Restrains him.*]
Nay, are you mad?

CAPONSACCHI

Yes, mad I think I am.

CONTI

Come, come away.

CAPONSACCHI

[*As if in a daze.*]

Yes, I will come, my friend.
[*Pauses on steps, looking off R. Exit* CONTI *L.B.*]
Those eyes, that sad sweet heaven of a face!

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Scene I

Early evening, six weeks later.

Caponsacchi's *cell in the Pieve. It is a bare and tiny room, set in front stage. There is a plain table with two chairs left of C. A bench backs up against R. wall. The entrance at R.B., a door from the open corridor which runs from L. to R. back of the cell itself, is the only entrance, but at L. is a door leading into a closet. There is a grating in the entrance door.*

At rise of curtain the stage is empty. It is early evening and the twilight dusk leaves the stage in half light. In the distance, off B., the organ is playing and at times the chanting of the service can be heard.

Almost at once enter B. two cloaked figures. They come on cautiously. They are the Governor *and* Guido.

GOVERNOR

[*Lowered voices throughout.*]
We have a moment, just a moment. Hark!
How lustily they chant the service end!

Once that is over we must quick be gone,
Else will he find us.

GUIDO

[*Holding up letter.*]
He'll find this instead.

GOVERNOR

Letters! Six weeks of letters. All in vain.

GUIDO

As I am man, I understand it not!
Full fifty letters have I written him
All signed by her, so warm and passionate,
With fiery pleadings that he come to her,
They'd melt chill winter swift to summer's heat.

GOVERNOR

They melt not him.

GUIDO

Nor do the fifty more
Melt her that I have writ to her from him,
Each one a masterpiece of glowing love.

GOVERNOR

I've told you oft, the thing is waste of time.
She's good and meek, he meek and good, a pair!
Put them together and they'd twirl their thumbs
And lisp long litanies of holy thought.
I ne'er believed there was so true a wife,
So stale a man!

GUIDO

Did I not see their look
There at the Carnival? If I know love,
The moon-calf thing the poets write about,
There ne'er was man more ripe for lure like this.

GOVERNOR

Confess the thing a failure. . . .

GUIDO

Nay, read this,
[*Hands him letter which* GOVERNOR *reads.*]
I try a new tack. Since he will not come
At pleadings passionate, I dare him come.
Maychance where he has dodged the gentler bait
The more adventurous lure he'll swallow whole.

GOVERNOR

[*Handing back note.*]
He's no man's coward. This may work.

GUIDO

And that's
Not all. My Margherita follows us
Within the hour.

GOVERNOR

Comes here?

GUIDO

To plead with him,
From her, Pompilia, armed with messages,

Which I prepared, of how I torture her. . . .
I torture her! There was no lie in that. . . .
How she will die unless he succors her.

GOVERNOR

Never before was in a cloister planned
Such able deviltry.
[*As chanting ends off stage.*]
Hark! Service ends.
[*Steals to B.*]

GUIDO

I'll slip the note within his Bible. . . .
[*Does so in Bible on table.*]

GOVERNOR

Come.
Beyond the archway lose ourselves. Make haste.

GUIDO

[*Following.*]
And you go to the Archbishop, make complaint
How sore this priest has wronged me with my wife.

GOVERNOR

[*At door.*]
Never before in all this wicked world
Were pains so needed to make people sin.
[*Exeunt. After pause enter* CAPONSACCHI.]
[CONTI *follows and stands in doorway.*]

CAPONSACCHI

Come in.

CONTI

[*With mellow whimsicality throughout.*]
But dare I when you speak so deep?
And blink as solemn as an owl?

CAPONSACCHI

[*With mock seriousness.*]
An owl?
A wise old bird who eats fat worms. Beware!

CONTI

Six weeks you've been like this, all sober, sour,
Aloof and silent as a catacomb.

CAPONSACCHI

Why is it pouter-pigeons shaped like men
All know so little and all talk so much?

CONTI

You've trudged from cell to cloister, back again,
Like hairy hermit doing penance. Me
You've shoved aside as if I were a plague.

CAPONSACCHI

You rotund rodent! You cylindric swine!
[*Reaches out hand to* CONTI'S *shoulder, smiles.*]
Old Conti, but it's good to have you here.

CONTI

[*With chuckling satisfaction.*]
It's good to hear you call me names again.

CAPONSACCHI

Sit down awhile, though 'tis the evening hour.
You should be in your cell intoning hymns.

CONTI

[*Sits R. of table.*]
A truce with hymns. Now tell me why a month
You've kept away from Duchess young or old
And gone play truant in the church all day?

CAPONSACCHI

Have you not heard of duty, Conti mine?

CONTI

Nobody wants you in these latter days
To prop the Church by breaking your backbone.

CAPONSACCHI

Did I not promise to renounce the world?

CONTI

Renounce the world? Nay, keep and give it us!
Alas! The ladies—how they've mourned for you
This last long month! "But can it be," they sigh,
"That he has turned a traitor to us all!"

CAPONSACCHI

Perhaps I have turned Christian, nothing else.

CONTI

Alas! Alack! A Christian monk!

CAPONSACCHI

Old friend,
I am at peace, a steady, strange new peace,
A self that truer grows, thinking of her.

CONTI

A lady? Now at last we nudge the truth.

CAPONSACCHI

Thinking—ah, Conti, I can talk to you—
Thinking how wholly separate am I,
A priest and celibate, from the sad strange wife
Of this Count Guido whom we know too well.

CONTI

Pompilia!

CAPONSACCHI

How I have a store of strengths
Eating into my heart, which crave employ,
How she might need perhaps a finger's help
And yet there is no way in the wide world
I can stretch out my hand to her for aid.

CONTI

What other symptoms? Have you fever? Pain?

CAPONSACCHI

How, when the Bible's page would preach its best,
Her face keeps glowing out of it.

CONTI

Go on!

CAPONSACCHI

How when I hear soft music through the dark,
I dream it is her voice I've never heard.

CONTI

Duty? Renounce the world? Turn Christian? Bah!
You are in love—

CAPONSACCHI

In love as with a star
That shines in heaven, to guide us straight to God.

CONTI

At last a lady interests him!

CAPONSACCHI

Yes,
To worship from afar, to serve unknown,
As does become God's honest priest. No more.

CONTI

[*Lowered voice.*]
Hush, Caponsacchi, listen!
[*They listen, noise of steps outside.*]
Do you hear?
Who comes clump, clumping down the cloister walk?
A pair, I'd say, one striding long, and one
Trotting short-stepped to keep the pace. They come
This way and hurrying. I'll have a look.
[*Looks through grating.*]
The Archbishop and my lord the Governor!

CAPONSACCHI

And coming here?

CONTI

Where is the hymn book? Quick!

[*Chants loudly from book.*]

"*In excelsis.*"

[*Aside.*]

There's trouble in the wind.

The Governor ne'er comes to church to *pray!*

Sit still and studious. I'll give them noise.

[*Roars, chanting.*]

"*In secula secul-o-o-rum—*"

[*There is a knock at the door, as* CONTI *repeats the chant ad lib., while* CAPONSACCHI, *laughing, joins in.*]

CAPONSACCHI

Pray come in.

[*Enter* ARCHBISHOP *and* GOVERNOR. CAPONSACCHI *rises.*]

ARCHBISHOP

What means this bellowing?

CAPONSACCHI

[*Bowing.*]

My lord!

CONTI

[*Bowing also.*]

My lord!

[*Innocently.*]

Ah, sir, I did but chant the evensong—

But quietly, that I might not disturb
The Canon Caponsacchi at his prayers.

ARCHBISHOP

He needs to pray if what I hear is true.

GOVERNOR

'Tis close to scandal, wicked scandal too.

ARCHBISHOP

Count Guido Franceschini makes complaint
That you have lately thought the nearest way
To church was past his far-off palace door,
That you stand gazing at a window there.

GOVERNOR

That window happening to be his wife's
Who sits and lets you smile, smiles back in truth.

CAPONSACCHI

Count Guido is mistaken. Never once
In these last weeks have I been near his house.
And if he knew his lady better, he
Would trust to her such honor as he has.

GOVERNOR

You know her better then!

CAPONSACCHI

I've seen her once.
Then neither of us spoke a word, and yet
I think I know her.

ARCHBISHOP

Soft. You go to Rome.

CAPONSACCHI

To-morrow—next day—any day you will.

ARCHBISHOP

To-morrow! Keep within your cell to-night.
[*To* GOVERNOR.]
With him away at Rome, 'twill all be past.

GOVERNOR

Count Guido says his wife has slyly sent
Letters to you and had replies from you.

CAPONSACCHI

I have received no messages from her.
So sent none in reply to her, my lord.

GOVERNOR

So sure is Guido and so red with wrath
It took all my persuasion to delay
His seeking you himself. So seek him not.
[*Exit with* ARCHBISHOP.]

CONTI

[*Squaring off humorously, hands on hips.*]
So . . . all unknown to me, behind my back . . .!

CAPONSACCHI

Nay, Conti, 'tis no time to jest. This thing's
As deep as Hell, a hundred times more vile,
So deep I cannot fathom it alone,
[*Takes bundle of letters from table drawer.*]
These letters signed Pompilia, one by one.

Have come in turn.
[*Gives them to* CONTI.]
Read them. And counsel me.

CONTI

[*Reading first letter aloud.*]
"Sir: She you lately flung the comfits to
Has a warm heart to give you in exchange
And gives it, loves you, and confesses thus."

CAPONSACCHI

Did she write that? This girl?

CONTI

I was a fool
To fling the comfits at the Carnival,
A blundering fat fool.

CAPONSACCHI

Now read the next?

CONTI

[*Reading second letter.*]
"My love, I beg you to be kind to-night,
To come to me, the southern side of the house
Where a small terrace overhangs a street
Blind and deserted, not the street in front . . .
My husband being away, the surly patch,
At his villa in the hills."

CAPONSACCHI

Did she write that?

CONTI

You did not go? You silently refused?
You, the adventurer, miss a chance like this!

CAPONSACCHI

Nay, I am not in the mood. Too serious
By far the event might be for her. Read on.

CONTI

[*Reading third letter.*]
"You must love some one else. I hear you do.
I will be one of many if you wish.
I take the crumbs from table gratefully,
Nor grudge who feasts there. Faith, I blush and blaze!"
[*Lays down letter.*]
Take them away, they soil my monkish mind.

CAPONSACCHI

Yes, worse and worse they grew, as days went by,
Each note a shady masterpiece of slime.
Do you think she wrote them, she, this girl, his wife?

CONTI

[*Reading fourth letter.*]
"I'm ever at the window of my room
Over the terrace at the Ave. Come!"
[*Laughs.*]
The Ave! That's the all-befitting time
For such a meeting! Letters such as these,
They should be published. What a book they'd make,
Sold on the sly for fifty lira each!

CAPONSACCHI

And so the missives followed thick and fast
For a month now. I came at every turn
On the soft sly adder underneath my tread,
I was met on the street, made sign to in the church.
A slip was found on the doorsill, scribbled word
'Twixt page and page of the prayer book in my place.
And ever from corners would be peering up
Some messenger disguised.

CONTI

You answered naught?

CAPONSACCHI

I answered nothing. Conti, did she write
These letters? Tell me.
[*Puts in drawer.*]

CONTI

If not she, who else?

CAPONSACCHI

Count Guido, for some end I cannot see.

CONTI

[*Rises.*]
Praise God you go to Rome to-morrow! Now
Burn quick the letters. Stay within your cell.
Open your Bible, read till sleep o'ercomes.
Forget all this. Farewell.
[*Crosses to door.*]

CAPONSACCHI

'Tis good advice.

[*Picks up Bible. Opens it. Finds letter.*]
Conti! The Bible, said you? Look you here.
[*Holds out letter.*]
The serpent slithers even in Holy Book.

CONTI

[*Coming back.*]
Then touch it not.

CAPONSACCHI

I'll chance its latest sting.
[*Opening letter—reads aloud.*]
"You have gained little by timidity.
My husband has found out my love at last.
So run till you reach Rome. And stay away
From my window. He might well be posted there."
[*To* CONTI.]
Did she write that? Pompilia?

CONTI

Let it pass.
To-morrow from Arezzo you depart,
First step in certain climb to lofty place.
Let puzzle solve itself, or stay unsolved.

CAPONSACCHI

Pompilia! Just her name calls out to me
As if for help! No, this is madness. No.
Hating all caution, I will cautious be.
[*He is putting letter in drawer as there comes a knock at door.*]

CONTI

You know who knocks?

CAPONSACCHI

[*Crosses to B.*]

No. I'll go to the door,

Peer through the grating.

[*Looks out and comes back.*]

Lurks there in the dark

A masked and muffled mystery in black.

I've seen her many times.

CONTI

A woman?

CAPONSACCHI

Yes.

His chief of messengers.

CONTI

Now see her not!

CAPONSACCHI

Yes, I shall see her, seek to draw her out.

You hide in the closet yonder, listen well.

Perhaps through her we'll find the truth of this.

[CONTI *slips into closet L.* CAPONSACCHI *sits by the table and pretends to read. The knock is repeated.*]

Come in!

[*Enter* MARGHERITA, *her face hidden at first by a black veil. She slips in furtively and closes the door after her without noise.* CAPONSACCHI *looks up, waits.*]

MARGHERITA

My lord, I bring new word from her.

CAPONSACCHI

From whom?

MARGHERITA

The Countess Franceschini, sir.

CAPONSACCHI

Who may you be?

MARGHERITA

[*Drawing back veil.*]
Count Guido's kind of maid.

CAPONSACCHI

Then why be loyal to his wife instead?

MARGHERITA

We all hate him. The lady suffers much.
'Tis just we show compassion, furnish help.
Especially since her choice is fixed so well.
[*Takes letter from bosom.*]
Her latest plea. Oh, sir, if you but knew
How sad she weeps each night you stay away!

CAPONSACCHI

[*Taking letter.*]
This eve at vespers she'll peep forth? What risk
Do we run of the husband?

MARGHERITA

Oh, no risk at all.
To-day all sudden he was called from town.
Besides, although he's jealous as a fool,
His chiefest bugbear is that friend of yours,
Fat little Canon Conti.

CAPONSACCHI

[*With backward glance at closet, round whose partly open door* CONTI'S *surprised face shows.*]
He fears him?
If Conti heard that, oh, how proud he'd be!

MARGHERITA

You'd never tell him?

CAPONSACCHI

Never in the world!

MARGHERITA

But Guido, sir, he'd scarce suspect his wife!
Does he think a child outwits him, a mere child?
Yet so full grown . . . a dish for any Duke!

CAPONSACCHI

[*Opening letter.*]
I'll read her message. . . .

MARGHERITA

Let me give you first
These tokens. . . . Flowers from her breast. A ring
Torn from her finger. And this lock of hair.

[*Gives them to him.*]
That you may doubt not that I come from her.

CAPONSACCHI

[*Puts them on table.*]
All these you easily might gain by theft.

MARGHERITA

Nay, read. Doubt me, my lord, but doubt not her.

CAPONSACCHI

[*Reading letter aloud.*]
"I wrote you of my love to win your aid.
Forget my love since you desire it not.
I wrote you of my fears to warn you off.
Forget the fears, since he is gone away.
But, if you've pity, come to me to-night.
This man, my husband, is a fiend from hell.
My mind's distraught, my spirit beaten down.
If you come not, then I am lost indeed."
[*Looks up.*]
So that's the final play!

MARGHERITA

What play, my lord?

CAPONSACCHI

[*Calls.*]
Come, Conti.
[*With ironic introduction, as* CONTI *appears from closet.*]
Canon Conti, poor fat soul!

CONTI

That closet's tight as layman's suit of clothes!
'Tis good to be set free! Why, on my life,
'Tis Margherita in the cloister lost!

CAPONSACCHI

[*To* MARGHERITA.]
Go tell your master I have plumbed his plan.
For some vile end he'd seek to draw me in
For joint disaster, with his wife. He's failed.
Go tell him so.

MARGHERITA

Nay, sir, I'll go tell her,
My pretty lady, you've no heart at all.
You leave her helpless when she needs you most.

CAPONSACCHI

How does she need?

MARGHERITA

Her only hope is you,
Penned up within those prison walls with him.
And he's a monster, tortures her! Oh, sir,
You are all chivalry, like a knight of old,
And you can save her—

CAPONSACCHI

[*Half to himself.*]
If this thing be true!
[*Turns on her.*]
Nay, 'tis not true. 'Tis but the latest lie,

Tell him for me that well you played your part
Worthy of such a model as his own,
[MARGHERITA *starts to go.*]
Come not again. At dawn I go to Rome.

MARGHERITA

[*At door.*]
Oh, she is lost, poor lady—she is lost!

CAPONSACCHI

Were it a play I could applaud you well.
[*Exit* MARGHERITA.]

CAPONSACCHI

Well, Conti, am I right?

CONTI

I scarcely know.

CAPONSACCHI

Nor I. At times it seemed she spoke the truth.

CONTI

There is no truth in her. I know her well.

CAPONSACCHI

Yes, it's a lie—oh, all is clear enough
And yet—

CONTI

And yet—down in your heart you fear
Some danger threatens her.

CAPONSACCHI

Have feared it long.
For this I've read these letters and re-read.
Knowing the word was not Pompilia's, yet
Forborne with fear lest some word straight from her
Might else escape me. Oh, where is the truth
Through all this twisting labyrinth of lies!

CONTI

I'll tell you this. The rumor's through the town
That since her parents sped their way to Rome
Pompilia's troubles have been trebled.

CAPONSACCHI

Why?

CONTI

Count Guido seeks their property, 'tis said.
If he can keep her on the rack, perchance
They may relent and give him what he wants.
So runs the tale from butcher's boy to cook
From cook to spinster—
[*With chuckle.*]
Then 'tis everywhere!

CAPONSACCHI

They talk, do nothing!

CONTI

But what can they do?

CAPONSACCHI

If I were not a priest—

CONTI

But priest you are!
'Tis not a thing for you to meddle with,
Even if all the gossip should be true.

CAPONSACCHI

Nay, what is true? Is Guido back of all?
Or does she, desperate, call to me in vain,
And thinks it is some fear withholds me? Fear
Of what? Suspense here is the terrible thing!
Not knowing—that is worst of all! Oh, would
Some sign might come to show me my true course!
[*There is a knocking at the door and, without waiting word,* GHERARDI, *drunk as usual, enters.*]

GHERARDI

Hie, that was close! I dodged the sacristan!
A busybody that! He'd patter straight
To the Archbishop if he caught me here.
[*Sits on bench R.*]

CAPONSACCHI

What brought you?

GHERARDI

I have news, bad news. So said,
"Yon Caponsacchi, he'll know what to do!"
Besides she spoke your name—

CAPONSACCHI

Who spoke my name?

GHERARDI

To-day quite late his Grace the Governor—
His Disgrace I should say—sent me with a note
To Guido, Count who counts but little—

CAPONSACCHI

Well?

GHERARDI

He was not there. I waited. While I wait
In slips the Countess, pale and all distrait.
Zounds! But she's beautiful!

CAPONSACCHI

Go on, go on!

GHERARDI

She begged me write a letter straight to Rome
Since she's untaught, can neither write nor read.

CAPONSACCHI

Hear that, my Conti! If she cannot write . . .!

GHERARDI

You spoil my story interrupting so!
Where was I? Oh. She bade me write a word
To ask her father come and take her hence.
These were her words—"Come save me or I die."

CAPONSACCHI

You wrote the letter, posted it by now?

GHERARDI

I wrote it not. Think you I'd get myself
Entangled up with Guido. Nay, his sword's
The best in all Arezzo—told her so—
'Twas then she spoke of you.

CAPONSACCHI

What did she say?

GHERARDI

She asked if she could trust you. "Yes," quoth I.
Before I'd time for more, echoed the noise
Of closing outer door. Guido came in.

CONTI

He found her there with you?

GHERARDI

Nay, like a wraith
She vanished, ere the echoes died away.

CAPONSACCHI

Now I did ask for sign and sign has come,
And with it summons clear.

CONTI

What can you mean?

CAPONSACCHI

I'll answer all those letters with myself.
I'll go to Guido's palace, seek her there.
And offer her what service I can give.

For good or ill—I'll end this thing to-night.
I'm tired of this same long black teasing lie.
Gherardi, will you go with me?

GHERARDI

With you
I would go anywhere—aye—even to hell,
With pity for the devil in my heart,
Had he to cope with you.

CAPONSACCHI

And Conti—you?

CONTI

Nay, I am yours, you know it well, all yours.
Yet I like not this last adventure. Think,
What know you of her? She may be in league
With Guido—

CAPONSACCHI

Once and only once I gazed
Deep in her eyes. I saw that sad sweet smile
But once, just once, and yet I know her. No!
I will to the window as he tempts and dares,
There may they lie in ambush, heads alert,
Kith, kin, and Count mustered to bite my heels.
[*Showing his staff.*]
But I'll be ready, give them taste of this.

CONTI

[*To door.*]
I'll lead the way.

GHERARDI

Beware the sacristan!

They go out as

THE CURTAIN FALLS

Scene II

A half hour later.

The street at rear of Guido's *palace.*

The back wall is the rear of the house, with a low platform balcony. Below near L. is a low doorway, from the palace itself. This is one entrance. Others at R. and at L., in the street. The house is bleak stone, no windows except the casement door which leads upon the balcony from Pompilia's *chamber, a fourth entrance.*

The moonlight which breaks the shadows on the stage shines more brightly at the R., leaving the L. of stage in deeper dusk.

At rise of curtain the stage is empty. Almost at once the Governor *comes on from R., goes up to door at back and knocks gently, a surreptitious knock.*

Door opens and Guido *enters.*

GUIDO

Well, what's the news?

GOVERNOR

I came straight from his cell.

GUIDO

How seemed he?

GOVERNOR

Oh, all dignity, repose!
The apotheosis of innocence!
Yet once or twice I thought his eye stirred fire.

GUIDO

He'll come.

GOVERNOR

The Archbishop bade him keep his cell.

GUIDO

So much the better. But command a man
What he must do, he does the opposite.

GOVERNOR

Remember this: To-night is final chance.
To-morrow he departs post-haste for Rome.

GUIDO

To-night is all we need. I've harried her
All day. I've terrified her with my sword,
I called her wanton, said I'd heard him boast
He loved her, and would steal her swift away
Some early night.

GOVERNOR

And what said she to that?

GUIDO

She spoke no word.

GOVERNOR

And showed no interest?

GUIDO

None visible. But list what happened next.
My Margherita, close within her room,
While we were skulking in the cloister dark,
Read her the latest letter from the priest . . .
The one I wrote this morning, quite my best . . .
Then told her Caponsacchi goes to Rome.

GOVERNOR

She knew not that?

GUIDO

I've held it back till now.
And Rome's her only haven.

GOVERNOR

Well, what next?

GUIDO

Then she broke down, bade Margherita go
Tell him to come to her to-night. And, armed
With tokens intimate, the maid has gone.
She's at his cell, or hither leading him
Straight to the trap I long have set for him.

GOVERNOR

How I'll rejoice if this can be his end!

A priest philandering with a noble's wife,
And caught by husband, falls upon his knees
And beats his breast and begs for easy death!

GUIDO

While she, the simple fool, awaits him here.
Belike's she's praying to the God she thinks
Prepares so providentially her way.
[*Laughs sneeringly.*]
Nay, God is not in this. But Guido is.

GOVERNOR

Some one comes running—

GUIDO

Margherita!

[*Enter* MARGHERITA *from R.*]

Well?

He follows after soon?

MARGHERITA

I did my best—

GUIDO

You mean—

MARGHERITA

I mean he saw through every move,
Read every ruse as if 'twere printed page.

GUIDO

He will not come!

MARGHERITA

[*Shakes head.*]
He loves her too, I think,
A love I dreamed of once. All women do.
Not love as you know love. Just standing there
He made me feel so foul, a thing unclean—

GUIDO

[*Suddenly strikes her and knocks her down.*]
You traitress! Common slut!

GOVERNOR

[*Restraining him.*]
Come, Guido, come!

GUIDO

Is he a devil who bewitches all!

GOVERNOR

Nay, come within. You'll raise the farther street
With all this shouting.
[*Leads him to door.*]

GUIDO

[*Looking back at* MARGHERITA *and shaking fist.*]
You shall pay for this!
I'll let you lie and rot! Not once again
You'll come within my house! I'm done with you!
[*They exeunt B. into house.*]

MARGHERITA

[*Stirring.*]
Forgive me, Guido . . . for I did my best.

[CONTI *enters cautiously R., speaks toward off stage R. in whisper.*]

CONTI

No one's about. . . .
[*Enter* GHERARDI *R.*]

GHERARDI

Arezzo many years
I've known, yet never knew this street was here.

CONTI

'Tis but a passageway.

CAPONSACCHI

[*Enters R.*]

Well, here we stand,
And there's the palace, there the latticed black
Of the ambush window, she somewhere within
All innocent of what goes on outside,
While he lurks hidden with his retinue—

CONTI

[*Discovering* MARGHERITA, *lying in the shadow.*]
What's this?

GHERARDI

A woman!

CONTI

Margherita's self!

CAPONSACCHI

[*Kneels beside her, lifts her up.*]
She's somehow hurt, but lives.

MARGHERITA

[*Moaning.*]
I did my best.

CONTI

She did her best!

GHERARDI

Now what means that?

CAPONSACCHI

Be still!

MARGHERITA

He told me . . . tell you . . . well I played my part.

CAPONSACCHI

And so you did. . . .

MARGHERITA

Who spoke? I thought t'was he.
I know a voice. . . .
[*She draws herself up a little.*]

CAPONSACCHI

'Tis Caponsacchi.

MARGHERITA

You?

So . . . after all you came!
[*Struggles to her feet.*]
I'll run and tell
My lady you are here.

CAPONSACCHI

Those are your words.
But in your mind 'tis Guido you will tell.

MARGHERITA

No. No. I swear it.

CAPONSACCHI

Swear no more to lies.

MARGHERITA

Why should I tell him aught? He struck me down,
When I had done his bidding. Let me go.
And lie to *him!*

CAPONSACCHI

Better not lie at all.
[*She sags in his arms.*]
Come, lean on me. You still are dazed and pale.

GHERARDI

[*To* CONTI.]
Now there's a picture. Saint and devil joined!

CAPONSACCHI

Gherardi! Conti!
[*Gives* MARGHERITA *to* GHERARDI.]
Take her with you.

MARGHERITA

[*Struggling.*]

No.

CAPONSACCHI

And guard her gently, not too far away
But that my call will reach you. Have you wine?

GHERARDI

[*Who is leading her off R., produces bottle.*]
Now there I never fail!

CAPONSACCHI

Give some to her.

[*Exeunt* GHERARDI *and* MARGHERITA *R. To* CONTI, *who lingers.*]

Thus far the fates seem with us. . . .

CONTI

Look, 'tis she!

[*On balcony above,* POMPILIA *enters; she is all in clinging black.*]

CAPONSACCHI

She stands in the dusk as on the altar stands,
Left alone with one moonbeam in her cell,
Our Lady of all the Sorrows.

CONTI

I'll be gone.
We'll be at the end of the street in easy call.

CAPONSACCHI

It seems a sacrilege to speak to her
Yet must I speak and will.
[*Exit* CONTI *R.*]
My lady!

POMPILIA

Sir!

CAPONSACCHI

'Tis Canon Caponsacchi.

POMPILIA

Yours a voice
I have imagined, never heard before.

CAPONSACCHI

Nay, it is strange, but I must tell you this:
When first you stepped upon the balcony
It seemed a whiteness at the casement waxed
Whiter and whiter, nearer grew, more near.
And yet your dress is black from head to foot.
It is the soul of you I think I see.

POMPILIA

And you half hidden in the dusk, the same
Rugged yet gentle face I first descried
At Carnival and trusted then as now.
'Tis strange perhaps that I should trust you so.

CAPONSACCHI

How can you trust in me? You know me not,

Know neither whence I sprung, what stream my blood,
What character is mine beneath this robe.

POMPILIA

I saw you at the Carnival. I see
You now. I ask no more.

CAPONSACCHI

But you must hear.
I am a priest, a canon of the Church.
Also I am the younger son of the house
Oldest now, greatest once, in my birthtown,
This same Arezzo. Fighters were we once.
All Italy then rang with the fighting fame
Of our progenitors. But I in turn
Was trained for Church, so spend my fighting days
Striving to live the spirit of my vows,
Fighting myself, calming my racing blood,
While all the spirit in me cries for life,
Life full and free, adventure, danger, love,
And all the human things my vows forbid.
I struggle still, will struggle all my days.
I mean to win, have firmer faith I shall,
Since at the Carnival I saw your face.
This I've confessed to no one else but God.
I tell you now that you may not mistake
The manner of man you call upon.

POMPILIA

I know
You better than you know yourself, I think,

Else would I call you not to deed like this.
The way is dark and danger hovers close,
Danger for you—yes, most of all for you.
And you are priest, the prey of cynics' scoff,
The world's wrong blame.

CAPONSACCHI

What duty has a priest?
To help the suffering, to save the weak,
To fight the evil with devoted heart,
And most of all to fear no power but God.
So think no more of me. Danger to meet?
Some danger threatens *you*. Some fear lurks close.
Tell me how I may serve you.

POMPILIA

It is this:
I am in course of being put to death.
While death concerned nothing but me I bowed
The head, and bade in heart my husband strike.
Now I imperil something more, it seems,
Something that's trulier me than this myself.
He must not know. My husband must not know.
He hates me. How much more he'd hate my child!

CAPONSACCHI

A child! Now do I understand your look!
'Tis the Madonna. Doubly now I serve.

POMPILIA

I'd never live to bear this babe if he

Foresaw its coming. So I must away.
My life was worthless. Now 'tis worthy all.

CAPONSACCHI

When knew you this?

POMPILIA

This very vivid morn.
Last night I whispered: "Done another day.
How good to sleep and so get nearer death."
When, what, first thing at daybreak pierced the sleep
With a summons to me? Up I sprang alive,
Light in me, light without me—everywhere
Change. A broad yellow sunbeam was let fall
From heaven to earth. A sudden drawbridge lay,
Along which marched a myriad merry motes.
On the house-eaves a dripping shag of weed
Shook diamonds on each dull gray lattice-square,
As first one, then another bird swept by
And light was off, and lo, was back again,
Always with one glad voice. And I stepped forth,
Stood on the terrace. O'er the roofs such sky!
My heart sang: "I too am to go away!
I too have something I must care about!"
Last night I almost prayed for leave to die.
Had I been dead! How right to be alive!

CAPONSACCHI

Now I am yours as never was I yours,
And I was yours from that first hour, I know,

When I saw first your eyes, gazed in your soul.
But tell me what to do and it is done.

POMPILIA

You go to Rome, the servant makes me hear.
Take me with you as you would take a dog
Masterless left for strangers to maltreat.
Thus take me home unto my father's house.
To Rome then—when is it you take me there?

CAPONSACCHI

I will go hence at once, make haste to find
The sure and speedy means of travel, seek
A carriage, horses, money and the rest—
A day's work—by to-morrow at this time.

POMPILIA

Each minute lost is mortal. Must you need
A whole long day to bring this thing about?
To-morrow eve may be too late. To-night—
Still through God's pity on me—there is time.

CAPONSACCHI

To-night it shall be then. I'll find a way.
Leave this house in the dark, this very night
Just before daybreak. To the Torrione go,
Over the low dilapidated wall
To San Clemente—there's no other gate
Unguarded at that hour. Some paces thence
An Inn stands. Cross to it. I shall be there,
And waiting.

POMPILIA

If I can but find the way!
But I shall find it, knowing you are there.
Such is the faith I've found in you, my friend.
Farewell.
[*She passes slowly within.*]

CAPONSACCHI

She's gone! How black the night becomes!
[*Calls off R.*]
Gherardi! Conti!
[*Enter* CONTI *R.*]

CONTI

[*Seeing him alone.*]
God be praised, all's well.

CAPONSACCHI

All's ill, but shall be well.
[*To* MARGHERITA—*who enters with* GHERARDI.]
Now are you free.
[*Points to L.*]
Proceed this way unto the thoroughfare.
Along it run to Guido's entrance door.
Tell him I'm here, have gone, shall come no more.

MARGHERITA

[*Pauses at L.*]
Mark this: Whate'er you plan, he'll plan more shrewd.
A man with scruples burdened always fails
Against a man who lacks them. Fare you well.
[*Exit L. hurrying.*]

CONTI

She swiftly speeds. And we must speed as well.

GHERARDI

You prate of speed!
[*To* CAPONSACCHI.]
Why he's been fast asleep.
While I kept watch. You should have heard him snore.

CONTI

Kept watch? He gave her wine. One little drop.
Gave none to me. Drank all the rest himself.

CAPONSACCHI

[*To* GHERARDI.]
Hearken, I mean to start for Rome this night.
Provide me with a laic dress, throw dust
I' the world's eye, stop the tongue of scandal so.
See there's a sword in case of accident,
And bring all to my cell within an hour.

GHERARDI

Nay, I'll be there in lesser time than that,
And you shall don the perfect cavalier,
Cloak, cap and feather, no appointment missed,
And with a sword of such a wicked mien
Strangers will take one glance, then run for life!
[*Exit* GHERARDI, *laughing.*]

CONTI

You go to Rome—to-night?

CAPONSACCHI

I take her there.

CONTI

You take her with you? But you have no right,
You're pledged to Church and through the Church to God.

CAPONSACCHI

No right? It is no harm if foolish fan
Waves signal from some lady in the street.
No harm to teach a black-eyed novice cards.
But save a soul that suffers, that is wrong!

CONTI

The world will say you love her.

CAPONSACCHI

So I do!
Not in the only way the world would think.
Through her I've caught a fleeting glimpse of God.
Duty to her is duty done for Him,
Shall I deny Him then and serve the world?

CONTI

'Twill end your present, end your future too.

CAPONSACCHI

And would you have me then for selfish gain
Play coward? No! I take her straight to Rome!

They cross to exit R., CAPONSACCHI, *his arm about* CONTI'S *shoulder, looking back at* POMPILIA'S *window—as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

Scene III

Two days later.

The yard of the Inn at Castlenuovo.

The Inn stands at R.B., with its doorway up a short flight of steps. Other entrances are at C.B., through an archway from the road; at R. from the stables, and L.F. from gardens. Down L. is a stone bench diagonally lengthwise to the front. Flowers border the Inn walls at back.

The stage is empty at rise. Landlord, *a stout, middle-aged, aproned figure, is within. Almost at once a* Boy *comes running breathlessly on from C.B., his first cry off stage.*

BOY

Oh, Signor!
[*Enters from C.B.*]
Signor!

LANDLORD

[*Enters from Inn.*]
Well, what news?

BOY

The Guard!!

LANDLORD

The Guard! And coming here?

BOY

They're at my heels,
Led by a bushy-bearded stranger, who
Comes from Arezzo. He's a noble Count.
I came to warn you.

LANDLORD

Get you quick inside.
Help carry to the cellar all the goods
I smuggled from across the border.
[*As the* Boy *starts off R.B.*]
Wait.
'Tis Marinetta whom they would arrest.
That traveler she robbed for me last month.
Was he not from Arezzo? She's the one.

BOY

I'll get her out of sight.
[*Exit.*]

LANDLORD

And I'll be fined,
Imprisoned, beaten, God knows what!
[*Kneeling in attitude of devotion.*]
Oh, God,
But save me just this once, I'll never more
Steal, murder, smuggle—
[*Enter* Guido, *C.B., followed by four guards in uniform.* Landlord *breaks off from prayer and hurries to them with obsequious bows.*]
Sirs, you're welcome here,

To this most proper place on all the road,
'Tis sometimes called the Monastery, since
I am so strict, so firm for law, so good.

IST GUARD

A villain this, we know him well, my lord,
For just one single silver piece he'd do
Far worse than Judas did for thirty.

GUIDO

Ah!
Here is your silver piece. I need your aid.

LANDLORD

My lord commands.

IST GUARD

[*Contemptuously at* LANDLORD.]
Our devil will obey—
[*He turns to other guards.*]
Post you at intervals 'twixt here and the road.
At first sight of the carriage warning give.
Then circle, hidden, round the Inn yard here,
Ready to close in on the quarry, once
You hear his call or mine.
[*Exeunt three guards C.B.*]
Speak freely, sir.
Since I have had my piece of silver too.

GUIDO

Two morns ago I awoke from heavy sleep
(I had been drugged, my servants too were drugged)

Found my wife flown, my strong box ransacked, too,
By the same priest who'd borne away my wife,
Borne her away by carriage straight for Rome.
By horse I followed, passed them in the night,
They'll be here any moment, stop a space,
Enough to change their horses, get some food,
And then rush on to reach the border Rome.
This will they do—unless they are detained!

LANDLORD

I'm to detain them?

GUIDO

[*Nodding.*]

First of all they'll ask
A change of horses. Have none ready.

LANDLORD

Aye!

GUIDO

Two days and nights they've been upon the road.
They're hungry, weary. Feed them, urge them rest
An hour or two, the while you go obtain
The horses that you lack.

LANDLORD

I see, my lord.

GUIDO

You'll have one bedroom ready, only one,
You'll lead them there that we may find them so.

LANDLORD

Ho, ho, the lady and the meek, mild priest!

GUIDO

If questioned later, you and yours must swear
They came last night, all night together stayed
In that same room.

LANDLORD

But that were perjury!

GUIDO

[*Handing him another silver piece.*]
Would this make lying easier?

LANDLORD

Ah, now
'Tis perjury no more, becomes white lie
By this—though still a lie.

GUIDO

[*Handing him another silver piece.*]
If I add this?

LANDLORD

Now 'tis no lie at all.

GUIDO

Then one thing more,
[*Takes packet of letters from tunic.*]
These letters—some in his hand, some in hers,

And all protesting love—these must be placed
In that same room, a final touch of proof.
'Twill make the Court more lenient when my sword
Has skewered both their souls to Hell.

LANDLORD

Well planned.

4TH GUARD

[*From off B.*]
They come.

2ND GUARD'S VOICE

[*Nearer, off stage.*]
They come.

3RD GUARD

[*Enters C.B.*]
The carriage comes, my lord.

IST GUARD

[*Motions to R.*]
Come near the stables so we'll keep an eye
On driver, horses, coach, if our friend here
Should fail his good and lawful proper task!
[*Exit R., following* 3RD GUARD.]

LANDLORD

I'll fail not!

GUIDO

[*Holding up another silver piece.*]
This is yours if you succeed.
[*Exit* GUIDO *R.*]

LANDLORD

[*Hurries up to Inn door, opens it.*]
Ho, there!
[BOY *appears to door.*]
Come, Marinetta, bring the child.
[*Young* WOMAN *with* BABY *in her arms appears.*]
[*To* BOY.]
You haste and meet them.
[BOY *hurries off C.B. To* MARINETTA.]
Walk here in the sun.
A pleasant homelike picture first they see,
Gives instant faith that all be calm and well.
'Tis to my good they stay and rest awhile.

MARINETTA

Who come?

LANDLORD

Only a lady and a priest.
[*Looks off C.B.*]
Yes, there's the lady. Can this be the priest?
Cast to the winds now are the cassock rags.
In cape and sword he comes, a cavalier,
A gallant figure. Nay, I like this not!
[*Enter C.B.* BOY *followed by* CAPONSACCHI *and* POMPILIA. *He is in cavalier's dress, with sword hanging at his side, a gallant figure indeed.*]
Most welcome, sir! Your most obedient—

CAPONSACCHI

What place is this?
[POMPILIA *comes down to bench.*]

LANDLORD

Castelnuovo.

CAPONSACCHI

Rome!

LANDLORD

As good as Rome. Rome is the next stage, sir,
This is where travelers' hearts are wont to beat,
Seeing the end of all their journey's pains.

CAPONSACCHI

Say you are saved, sweet lady, almost Rome,
A change of horses, landlord, with all speed.

LANDLORD

With all speed possible, an hour at most.

CAPONSACCHI

An hour?

LANDLORD

Be sure I'll do my best, my lord.
[*Exit R.B.*]

CAPONSACCHI

[*To* MARINETTA.]
I take her home because her heart is hurt.
Comfort her as you women understand.
[*Gently to* POMPILIA.]
I'll to the stable, speed the laggard grooms
With threats, with gold and promises of more.

Fear nothing. We'll arrive.
[*Crosses to R., half to himself.*]
Would I were sure!

[*Exit R.*]

MARINETTA

[*Sits on bench beside* POMPILIA.]
Dear lady!

POMPILIA

[*Looks at her.*]
Who are you?
[*Sees the child and smiles.*]
It matters not,
You are a mother, must be friend. So I
Have dreamed to hold just such a child, my own.

MARINETTA

He's sound asleep.

POMPILIA

[*Taking the child.*]
I'll wake him not, so soft
He'll lie within my arms, the pretty thing.
Who is it makes the soft gold hair turn black,
And sets the tongue, might lie so long at rest,
Trying to talk? The God who does all this
Will scarcely fail protect a mother who
Does all in turn to save her unborn child.

MARINETTA

Then rest you, lady, fear forgotten here.

POMPILIA

Swift have we driven straight through dusk to clear,
Through day and night, and day again and night.

MARINETTA

And all the time no rest?

POMPILIA

All rest, indeed.
Was he not there beside me all the way?

MARINETTA

Your—brother?

POMPILIA

Brother, savior, friend, who knew
My every mood before I knew myself,
Sat silent long, or gently talked to take
My mind from horrors left behind. Till towns,
Flowers and faces, all the things we passed,
Seemed good, all good, since he was ever there.
And never did his hand touch mine, remind
My shuddering soul of other touch I loathed.
Where has he gone? It matters not. I know
'Tis to prepare my way, make easier
My path.

MARINETTA

At any moment he'll return.

POMPILIA

Why have I told you this? I think it is

Because you put your baby in my arms.
[*Gives* MARINETTA *the child.*]
But take him now.
[*Wavers a little.*]
I'm strangely faint. 'Twill pass.
[*Enter* CAPONSACCHI *R. and* LANDLORD *R.B.*]

MARINETTA

Two days and nights and never a wink of sleep,
'Tis more than human frailty can stand.

LANDLORD

[*To* CAPONSACCHI.]
Most true. An hour's rest—

POMPILIA

'Tis nothing.

CAPONSACCHI

No!
I must be brutal for her sake. We'll on,
Then drench her in repose—
[POMPILIA *wavers.*]
Bring wine, be quick!

POMPILIA

[*Babbling.*]
I saw Count Guido in the woods one day
Ill-treat a lamb so that some wolf would hear
Its cries and come, be quickly caught, enticed
To the trap. 'Tis so with me—I'm in a trap!
[*Tries to rise to her feet, then sinks back smiling as* CAPONSACCHI *kneels beside her.*]

No, I am saved, for God has found a way.
The way is Caponsacchi, mine, thank God.

CAPONSACCHI

Pompilia!

POMPILIA

He is here. I'm safe once more.

CAPONSACCHI

[*Giving her wine which the* LANDLORD *has brought.*]
Drink this, dear lady, get new strength again.
[*She drinks.*]
Enough to carry you the few miles more
That end in final safety.

POMPILIA

Was I faint?
I know not why. I now am very strong.

CAPONSACCHI

'Tis food you need. All this hard journey long
You've starved yourself for fear 'twould mean delay.
There's time now while fresh horses will be brought.
We lose no moment therefore.
[*To* LANDLORD.]
Get some food.
[*Exit* LANDLORD, *beckoning surreptitiously to* MARINETTA, *who follows.*]
A few short hours remain and there's an end.
Then no more of the terrible journey.

POMPILIA

Yes—
But where will you be? God suffice me then!

CAPONSACCHI

Keep courage. One day more, we must go on,
Outrun the death that gallops close behind.
[LANDLORD *enters at back with* BOY *who brings food.*
MARINETTA *follows.*]

POMPILIA

No, death's ahead! I'm faint, I must not die.
I have more life to save than just my own.
[*She swoons on bench.*]

LANDLORD

'Tis sleep, but just a little sleep she needs.
I knew it, have the proper room prepared.
It has a couch within will serve for you,
For rest you need as well as she, my lord.

CAPONSACCHI

Oh, my foreboding! But we cannot choose.
I'll fetch her thither.

POMPILIA

[*Faintly.*]
He will watch and care.

MARINETTA

She spoke.

LANDLORD

What did she say?

MARINETTA

I could not hear.

CAPONSACCHI

Soft sighs, naught else, sweet music. Music seems
Always to hover just above her lips,
Not settle, break a silence, music too.
[*Picks her up and carries her to R.B.*]

MARINETTA

You love her very much, sir, do you not?

CAPONSACCHI

[*On steps.*]
Nay, 'tis not love. 'Tis so much more than that.
It's faith, the faith that there's a God who reigns
And rules out of this low world. That is all.
[*Exit R.B.*]

MARINETTA

He loves, for all his lofty words and talk!
A priest, too! Never was such naughtiness.
If I know man, he thinks unpriestly thoughts
Over the shy pale lady, lay so light
For a moment in his arms, the lucky one.
[*Exit R.B.*]

LANDLORD

I scarcely blame him overmuch—
[*To R., calls.*]

My lord!

[*Enter* GUIDO *R.*]
All's as you ordered. Soon they'll be asleep.

GUIDO

'Tis well. The letters?

LANDLORD

Those are placed there too.

GUIDO

Where they'll not see them?

LANDLORD

They'll see nothing, sir,
His eyes are blinking for the sleep he's lost,
And hers are closed already.

GUIDO

Excellent!

[*Enter* 1ST GUARD.]
Your men are near?

GUARD

As you commanded, sir!

GUIDO

There's nothing left but sharpen up my sword.

LANDLORD

There's something else.

GUIDO

What mean you?

LANDLORD

Nothing much.
A single silver piece you said were mine,
When once your play was set.

GUIDO

[*Throwing it to him.*]

'Tis yours.

GUARD

[*Warningly as* MARINETTA *enters R.B.*]

My lord!

MARINETTA

He will not stay within. He's coming forth.
He chants her praises like a litany,
But lets her charms lie idle. God forbid
I ever have a lover so remiss.

GUIDO

Post you on that side.
[*Points to R.*]

I on this. 'Tis well.
[*To L. exit, exit* GUARD *R.*]

MARINETTA

[*To* LANDLORD.]
Poor priest, I think he senses all's not right.

LANDLORD

I like not blood—
[*Eyeing the silver piece.*]

But I must live. The Count
Will make short work of him. Praise God for that.
[*Enter* CAPONSACCHI *R.B.*]

MARINETTA

[*To* CAPONSACCHI.]
Fear not, all's well—she soundly sleeps.

CAPONSACCHI

[*Half to himself.*]
But I
Fear all the same, keep fearing more and more,
Filled with a sense of such impending woe
For her, I could ascend and break her sleep,
Carry her on to Rome on foot, do aught
Would take her from this grim, foreboding place.
[*Enter* GUIDO *L.*]

GUIDO

My salutation to your priestship! What,
And could you leave the lady's side so soon?

CAPONSACCHI

'Tis strange but you surprise me not. I looked
To see your scowling malice hereabouts,
That leering triumph on your face. All's one.
Foreboding's past and action lies ahead.

GUIDO

How keen he is, and bold as 'twere Troy town.
He struts like Paris in correct costume.
Where is the lady whom you stole from me?

CAPONSACCHI

I interposed to save your wife from death,
Yourself from shame, the true and only shame.
What I have done I answer anywhere,
Here if you will. You see I have a sword.

GUIDO

[*Draws.*]
Enough of fooling, here's the messenger
Shall tell you all my hate—
[*As they fight.*]
And when that's done
Shall tell its word of greater hate to her.
This common woman; this, your mistress, priest!

CAPONSACCHI

Now shall you die, abolished with your lie,
A spittle wiped off from the face of God.
[*Drives* GUIDO *back toward L.*]

MARINETTA

He fences well, he's skilled beyond belief,
He drives him back.

LANDLORD

How learned he this, a priest?

CAPONSACCHI

Before I said my vows I played with sword.
God will I've not forgot its uses now.

More skill! More strength! Let right triumphant be!
[*With a twist of the wrist he sends* GUIDO'S *sword flying.*]

GUIDO

Help, help!
[*Falls on his knees pleading.*]
You would not kill me all unshriven.
[*Guards enter from B. and* 1ST GUARD *from R. They come up behind* CAPONSACCHI.]

CAPONSACCHI

Your death I want not—only life for her.

GUIDO

Most merciful—
[*To Guards, when they are close to* CAPONSACCHI.]
Now seize and bind him, friends.
[*They seize* CAPONSACCHI.]
So far, so good. There is the lover, sirs.
He is a priest, for all his smart disguise,
While upstairs hides my wife, the runaway,
His mistress. The two plotted poison first,
Plundered me after and eloped thus far,
Where now you find them. Do your duty quick.

MARINETTA

[*To* LANDLORD.]
He's very brave now that the priest is bound.

GUIDO

[*Spits in* CAPONSACCHI'S *face.*]
You thought I'd have no trump to play, forgot,

While you may have count's swordship, I might have
The cunning folk attribute to the priest.
We'll leave him here outside, mount to their room.
[*Enter, R.B.,* POMPILIA.]

POMPILIA

[*Not seeing* GUIDO *at R.*]
Ah, Caponsacchi, who are these—these men
Who hold you? Nay, they bind you. What's amiss?

CAPONSACCHI

'Tis Guido! Fear him not.

POMPILIA

[*Seeing* GUIDO *for the first time.*]
I see him now,
His the black figure, the opprobrious blur
Against all peace and joy and light and life.

GUIDO

Behold the poisoner, the adulteress.
She comes from sleep in their joint room. Hold him,
The while I deal with her, my wife.

POMPILIA

And him
Also you outrage—him, too, my sole friend,
Guardian and savior. That I balk you of!
[*She leans down, picks from the ground* GUIDO's *sword.*]

GUIDO

Save me—

[*A guard jumps upon her as she starts a thrust, wrests the sword from her hand and gives it to* GUIDO.]

POMPILIA

[*Still struggling.*]

Then let me die instead, I beg,
At least forever I am mine and God's,
Thanks to his liberating angel, Death.
Never again degraded to be his,
The ignoble noble, the unmanly man,
The beast below the beast in brutishness!
Oh, Caponsacchi—

[*She sways and falls fainting at bottom of steps.*]

MARINETTA

[*Holding her up.*]

Brave, sweet lady! You—

[*Turning to* GUIDO.]

Go find a child to fence with. You have guards
In plenty to protect you—

GUIDO

Silence, wench.

[*To guards.*]

We'll search first for the things they stole from me.
With no few amorous pieces, verse and prose,
I have much reason to expect to find.

CAPONSACCHI

Nothing you'll find unless you placed it there.

Perhaps this landlord your accomplice is,
To plant the proof that would be lacking else.

LANDLORD

No, no, I swear, 'tis false.

[*A crowd has assembled at L. during the scene, peasants, Inn hangers-on, etc.*]

IST MAN

His oath! Ha, ha!
For money he would swear that black is white.

[*Crowd jeers.*]

CAPONSACCHI

[*To the crowd.*]
Will you stand idle, see injustice done?

MARINETTA

She wakes!

POMPILIA

My Caponsacchi!

GUIDO

Hear you that?
Bear witness then. Now drag them to the jail.

CAPONSACCHI

Nay, touch her not. You heard him call me priest.
A Tuscan noble, I might claim the Duke.
A priest, I rather choose the church, bid Rome
Cover the wronged with her inviolate shield.

2ND MAN

To Rome!

3RD MAN

Keep hands off. Pay a priest respect.

[*Crowd shouts: "To Rome—To Rome."*]

IST MAN

Take them to Rome.

GUIDO

[*To guards.*]

Nay, listen not to this.

CAPONSACCHI

I am a priest, a canon of the church,
And I demand the church I serve decide.
The Church's arms are long and powerful.
Her wrath slight at your peril!

VOICES

Rome! To Rome!

IST GUARD

We do not dare refuse. They go to Rome!

CAPONSACCHI

Now will I pray God's blessing on this place.
Prayers move God. Threats and nothing else move men.

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

Scene I

A week later.

The Court Room in the Vatican.

*The scene is the same as that of Prologue except that the only chairs are those on the dais, which are occupied by the three Judges—*Tommati, Venturni, Scalchi, *and a chair at R. in which* Pompilia *is sitting. The curtains at B. are drawn to one side, leaving recess open to view.*

At rise of curtain the three Judges are sitting in their accustomed places. A papal Guard (Andrea *of the Prologue*) *stands near door R. while, facing the Judges, sits* Pompilia *garbed as in Act II, Scene III, and* Caponsacchi, *in the cavalier dress which he wore in the same scene, standing C.*

The atmosphere of the Court in this scene is much less formal than that in Prologue and Epilogue. This is not a trial for murder but merely a hearing over a casual case, a rather amusing episode of marital unhappiness, and the inevitable triangle. It is thus that the Judges treat the case, with "permissible

smirks" "the pen's pretense at play with pursed mouth," "the titter stifled in the hollow palm"—etc.

CAPONSACCHI *has just finished his story of the flight as the Curtain Rises.*

CAPONSACCHI

Such is our story. 'Twas a week ago
They bore us off to separate cells of the same
Ignoble prison, and but yesterday
Brought us from Castelnuovo here to you.

VENTURINI

We've heard the husband,—here's the other side.

SCALCHI

Hard to believe but not impossible!

VENTURINI

The husband's tale is much more likely. He,
A Count of ancient house and man of rank,
Maintains this wife was false—that with this priest
She poisoned, plundered him and ran away.
He caught them all red-handed at the Inn,
And he brings many proofs while they have none.

SCALCHI

'Tis a situation none too new, alas!
The husband, wife, and other man—!

VENTURINI

And each
Is always right!

SCALCHI

And so the other wrong!

VENTURINI

If each be right, then we should punish none.

SCALCHI

If each be wrong, then we should punish all.

TOMMATI

Nay, this is serious business, good my lords.
Here is a wife makes holiday from home.
A wife that flies her husband's house is wrong.

POMPILIA

Oh, sirs, what could I do but what I did?
Earth was made hell to me who did no harm.
I only could emerge one way from hell
By catching at the one hand held me, so
I caught at it and thereby stepped to Heaven.
If that be wrong, do with me what you will.

SCALCHI

Hard to believe but not impossible!

TOMMATI

A priest discovered truant to his church,
In masquerade, moreover, and a sword,
And brawling in an inn-yard once he's caught!
'Tis scarcely place for Canon of the church.

CAPONSACCHI

If as a man, then much more as a priest,
I hold me bound to help weak innocence.

If so my worldly reputation burst,
Being the bubble it is, why burst it may.
Blame I can bear, but not blameworthiness.

VENTURINI

Blameworthiness? Are not two nights, and days,
You and this lady on the road alone—
Say nothing of the Inn-room—are not these
Blameworthy?

CAPONSACCHI

Sir, enough, that first to last
I never touched her lip nor she my hand,
Nor either of us thought a thought, much less
Spoke a word which the Virgin might not hear.
Be such your question, so I answer it.

TOMMATI

[*Holding up package of letters.*]
Let us go back, some questions answer us.
How was it that a wife young, innocent,
Could write you letters phrased with filth like this?

CAPONSACCHI

How could she write them when she cannot write,
No, nor yet read? Nay, look at her, my lords,
And tell me if you think she wrote them.

TOMMATI

H'm!

[*Holding up another packet.*]
And what have you to say to these replies?

Both verse and prose and surely in your hand,
And all received by her?

CAPONSACCHI

I only say
I wrote them not. They're all rank forgery,
Forged by the hand that tortured her as well.

SCALCHI

Difficult to believe yet possible!

CAPONSACCHI

His facts are lies. His letters are the fact,
An infiltration flavored with himself.

TOMMATI

[*Holding up another packet.*]
These documents which at the Inn were found
Right after your arrest?

CAPONSACCHI

Were forged as well,
And slyly placed and found for evidence.

VENTURINI

And what of the clandestine visits paid
This wife by you while the husband was away,
Before you had recourse to flight at all?

CAPONSACCHI

Who witnessed or will testify this lie?

VENTURINI

The trusty servant—Margherita!

CAPONSACCHI

She!

Why, she is Guido's mistress, owned by him
Body and soul to do his bidding so.

SCALCHI

If this be true—

VENTURINI

Another tangent this!

CAPONSACCHI

Were I the accepted suitor, free of the house,
If we could meet at will, why should we flee?

VENTURINI

Do you deny you love this woman?

CAPONSACCHI

Sir,

Whate'er such question put to me may mean,
My answer would be insolence to her.
Sirs, give what credit to the lies you can.
No further word I'll speak in my defense,
And God shall answer for the lady.

TOMMATI

H'm!

SCALCHI

If He be dumb, then is he done as well.

TOMMATI

[*To* ANDREA.]
Conduct them whence they came.

CAPONSACCHI

[*As* POMPILIA *is escorted by* ANDREA *to R.*]
My lords, I beg,
Whatever your decision be, you place
This lady safe from Guido and his hate.
This all my purpose was. If this be done
I am content with any punishment.
[*Exit with* POMPILIA *and* GUARD.]

VENTURINI

The accused declare that in thought, word, and deed,
Innocent were they both from first to last,
As male babe haply laid by female babe
At church, on edge of the baptismal font,
Together for a minute, perfect pure.

SCALCHI

Difficult to believe yet possible.

TOMMATI

It is a puzzling case. Our course is clear.
To all men be our moderation known,
Rewarding none while compensating each.

VENTURINI

The priest should suffer.

TOMMATI

Aye, and so he shall.
Suppose he be retired, unshent, unshamed,
Sent for some months to Civita.

VENTURINI

Some months?
How many?

TOMMATI

Eight, we'll say.

VENTURINI

Why eight, my lord?

TOMMATI

'Twill bring him free at Christmas, start New Year.

VENTURINI

The wife?

TOMMATI

'Tis my suggestion she be placed
Under her parents' watchful care.

VENTURINI

How so?
You give her then exactly what she wished.

TOMMATI

If this be what she wished, she's innocent.
If she be guilty, then she'll suffer much
From parents' chiding, neighbors' tattle—

VENTURINI

True!

TOMMATI

As for the husband, he is justified,
And he is free of his domestic plague.
What better thing could happen to a man!

VENTURINI

Most satisfactory and shrewd, my lord,
Of wisdom ripe as does become the law.

TOMMATI

[*Turns to* SCALCHI, *who has dozed off in his chair.*]
And Scalchi?

VENTURINI

[*As* SCALCHI'S *head bobs in his sleep.*]
Look, he nods, shows his assent!

TOMMATI

I'll try the gavel—
[*Bangs hard with gavel.* SCALCHI *awakes blinkingly.*]
Scalchi, what say you?

SCALCHI

Hard to believe but not impossible!
[*Both* TOMMATI *and* VENTURINI *break into roars of laughter as reënter* ANDREA.]

VENTURINI

Now this is good!

ANDREA

You summoned me?

TOMMATI

[*Between gusts of laughter, nods.*]

Next case!

CURTAIN

Scene II

Eight months later, Christmas eve.

Pietro's *home, Rome.*

The entrances are at C.B. from the street and at R.F., from the inner part of the house. In the back wall R. of the door C.B. is a window.

The room is simply furnished. A table stands at right, with chairs grouped about it. There is a cupboard at left with drawers beneath. Down stage from the cupboard, at left of C. is a divan placed diagonally. These are the essential properties. It is the living-room in a simple Roman cottage of the period, suggesting well-to-do comfort as desired by people of simple tastes.

At rise of curtain Pompilia *is sitting on the divan. She is sewing on a baby's dress. Almost at once* Violante *enters from right.*

VIOLANTE

Pompilia, shall we read? Or play a game?
You sit too silent all these perfect days.

POMPILIA

No, mother, I am sewing. Look!
[*Holds up baby's garment.*]

VIOLANTE

[*Coming to her.*]
My dear,
I know 'twas hard to have your little babe
Taken away.

POMPILIA

He's two weeks old to-night.

VIOLANTE

The nuns can better care for him than you,
Not strong yet.

POMPILIA

Will I soon be strong again?
How empty seem these arms!

VIOLANTE

Is it the child
Alone you, silent, dream about?

POMPILIA

Who else?

VIOLANTE

This Caponsacchi.

POMPILIA

Him they treated ill.
For what he did for me they banished him
For eight months' time. He's free this very day,
Praise God for that.

VIOLANTE

Come, put him from your mind,
You'll never see him more. 'Tis better so.

POMPILIA

Yes, I shall see him—when, I cannot tell,
Nor how, nor where the miracle will fall,
But it will fall. Meanwhile, though leagues away,
He still is here, not outside with the world,
Here, here, I have him in his rightful place.
I feel for what I verily find. Again
The face, again the eyes, again, through all,
The heart and its immeasurable love
Of my one friend, mine only, all my own.

VIOLANTE

Talk not of love. 'Tis wicked 'twixt you two.

POMPILIA

That's the world's insight. Soul can lie by soul
Closer than bodies. So his soul and mine.
I did pray, do pray, in the prayer shall die,

"Oh, to have Caponsacchi for my guide!
Ever his face upturned to mine, his hand
Holding my hand across the world."

VIOLANTE

Enough!
I will not listen. Time I took command.
Nor shall you see him if the chance should come,
And come it never shall.
[*There is a knock at C.B.*]
Now who is that?
Pietro back again, it is most like.
[*She opens the door and enter* CONTI.]

CONTI

Good even.
[*Seeing* POMPILIA.]
So I've found you out at last.
I had to mask my queries. Back and forth
I needs must dodge about, lest enmity
Should guess my errand. Lady, I have news.

POMPILIA

My mother, this is Canon Conti.
[VIOLANTE *bows, places chair for* CONTI.]

CONTI

Yes,
Fresh from Arezzo, scarce a fortnight since.
[*To* POMPILIA.]
I came to Rome to meet a certain priest
Who eight months since was sent to Civita.

POMPILIA

To Rome? He's here in Rome?

CONTI

Yes, sentence up,
He hurried hither with all speed, arrived
An hour ago, and now waits my return
To tell him whether he may come this night
To see your parents, take his leave of you.

POMPILIA

His leave?

CONTI

To-morrow morn he starts away,
A journey long. 'Twill take a year or more.

POMPILIA

I understand.

CONTI

But first he'd know by sight
That what men call his failure is success.

VIOLANTE

He thinks it wise to risk discovery
Which might bring ruin both to him and her!

CONTI

What harm? We come together, he and I,
Two priests who saw a lady's plight, which one
Was brave enough to take her out of. Would
That I had been the one!

POMPILIA

When will he come?

CONTI

Within an hour. As soon as I fare back
And fetch him hither.

POMPILIA

Say a welcome waits
From this, my mother, and my father too.

VIOLANTE

Pompilia!

POMPILIA

Most from me, who owe him most.
[*Enter at back,* PIETRO.]

CONTI

I'll soon be back. He's pacing now the room,
All hatted, caped. He thinks they have been hours,
These minutes since I left him. Fare you well.
[*Exit B.*]

PIETRO

Who was he?

POMPILIA

Conti is his name.

VIOLANTE

A friend
Of Caponsacchi from Arezzo.

PIETRO

Good!

[*He comes down to* POMPILIA.]
Good word has come to you. I see fresh peace
In those deep eyes that were so wistful. Aye,
It almost broke my heart to look in them.

VIOLANTE

This Caponsacchi is in Rome! To-night
Comes here. Oh, stop him. 'Tis a mad mistake.

PIETRO

Mistake? Why, no. To me 'twill give a chance
To thank him humbly for our daughter's life.

VIOLANTE

Then go to him and thank him. That were wise.
But let him not come here. Are we not watched?
You know what many think, all would believe,
Pompilia and this priest—

PIETRO

Nay, say it not.

VIOLANTE

Think you Count Guido, beaten, now calls quits?
Mistake at best, such visit may be worse.

POMPILIA

Were it the maddest, mad mistake, would lead
To fate far worse than any I have known,
Still would I say, have Caponsacchi come.

And then to-morrow I can be content,
By this one sight of him, abolish hate
And memory and fear, no danger more.

VIOLANTE

No danger more? Why, danger ever lurks
While Guido still is balked of you and gold.
When once he hears about this child, your heir,
Who gets our gold, your gold in turn, then his,
Will Guido not come claim him, seize him straight
Away from you?

POMPILIA

Not that!

VIOLANTE

'Twas fear of him
Made us advise you send the child away.
[POMPILIA *covers her face with her hands.*]

PIETRO

[*Puts his arm about her. To* VIOLANTE.]
All this we kept from her for her own good,
And now you strike new terror to her soul.
[*To* POMPILIA.]
The child is safe and Guido's far away,
We dwell in Rome, protected by the law.
So, child, the menacing black shadow lifts.
[*To* VIOLANTE.]
And, Violante, keep you out no gleam
Of light. This Caponsacchi is such gleam.

VIOLANTE

I only wished protect her from herself.
Forgive me, child. I caused your trouble, cause
You trouble still.

POMPILIA

[*In* VIOLANTE'S *arms as well as* PIETRO'S.]
You meant it for my good.
Yes, each of you and both of you. 'Tis past.
Echoes die off, scarcely reverberate
Forever. Why should ill keep echoing ill?

PIETRO

We will avoid the city, tempt no more
The greedy ones by feasting and parade,
Live at the other villa—we know where.
I still have two or three old friends will grope
Their way along the mere half mile of road,
With staff and lantern on a moonless night. . . .

VIOLANTE

Pietro! Stop! You chatter like a crow.
Pompilia tires of the tattle, listens not.

POMPILIA

Nay, I am listening.

VIOLANTE

Aye, but not to him.
You listen for a footstep in the street,
That hesitates outside the door, and then

You listen for the knock.
[*There is a knock at door B.*]

POMPILIA

I heard no step!

PIETRO

No, nor did I.

VIOLANTE

No, nor you should. They're wise.
They come on tiptoe lest the neighbors hear.
Think you they come a-clattering to the door?
[*Knock is repeated.*]
Who's there?

VOICE

[*Off stage.*]

'Tis Caponsacchi—

POMPILIA

Open not!

VIOLANTE

How changeable you are!

POMPILIA

'Tis very strange.
The voice, it is not his.

VIOLANTE

Then Conti?

POMPILIA

No!

PIETRO

Some guide they've picked to lead them here perhaps.
[*Knock is repeated.*]

POMPILIA

It shatters all our peace, echoes of dread!

PIETRO

[*To* VIOLANTE.]
Did I not tell you all your idle talk
Brought back her terror?
[*To* POMPILIA.]
Hark! 'Tis Christmas Eve—
[*Bells are ringing outside.*]
All peace on earth, good will to men. No man,
No chance marauder or deliberate,
Would choose such night for practicing his trade.
So, Violante, open wide the door.
[VIOLANTE *unlocks the door. It opens, and* GUIDO *rushes in, followed by four ruffians.*]

POMPILIA

Guido!

GUIDO

[*To the men.*]
Seize, hold, and if a cry but starts
To shape itself in any throat of the three,
Use quick your sword to block it back. Well done.

[*Three of the men have seized* VIOLANTE, PIETRO *and* POMPILIA. GUIDO *rebolts the door.*]
[*To man who holds* POMPILIA.]
Release her. She's no danger. Stand by close!
[*To fourth man.*]
The window—draw its curtains tight!
[*To the others.*]
You see,
Such things may happen here within the hour,
The gentle-minded passerby would quail
At sight of.
[*To* PIETRO *who is struggling.*]
Struggle not. These men of mine
Come straight from field and farm. They have strong arms,
Hard hands, stout hearts. Besides they're to be paid
No trifling sum, if naught here goes amiss.

VIOLANTE

He means to murder us!

GUIDO

And if I do?
You thought you'd beaten me. You had till she
Brought forth my victory. She knew it not.
By an heir's birth I was assured at once
Of the main prize, all the money in dispute.
Pompilia's fortune might be hers or yours,
But now it is the child's, this brat of hers.
That brat being mine, too, all grows mine at last.
I seek the child.

PIETRO

We will not give him up.
Go hunt the house and find him if you can.

GUIDO

While you gain time.

POMPILIA

He is not here!

GUIDO

A lie!

[*To fourth man.*]
Go search you every room, and quickly too.
And when you find him bring him gently here.
Aye, gently as you'd bring a cask of gold,
For gold he is.
[*Exit fourth man R.*]

POMPILIA

The money it is naught.
I will entreat them to desist, submit,
Give you the money and be poor in peace.

GUIDO

And change their minds when once my back is turned!
I'll take the child for hostage, so make sure!
[*Crosses to table.*]
You've quite a feast laid out,
[*Turns suspiciously.*]
Expect you then
Some guest or guests?

PIETRO

'Twas solely for ourselves.

GUIDO

[*Raises glass of wine.*]
Then will I drink your health! Not long it lasts,
But while it lasts, your health!

VIOLANTE

Be merciful!

PIETRO

The world will countenance not murder, sir.

GUIDO

Oh, I've a tale for that brooks no reply!
What will I say brought me to Rome? Just this:
With open arms I seek my wife and child,
Prepared to all forgive. I find no child,
But wife in the embraces of that priest
Who caused her to elope from me.
[*As* PIETRO *glances at door B.*]
Why look
You at the door?

VIOLANTE

He sickens of your lies!

GUIDO

If some one you expect—

PIETRO

No one, I swear!

GUIDO

[*Shrugs, satisfied.*]
I shall go on, of how the priest and she,
Backed by you pander pair who watch the while,
Spring on me like so many tiger-cats.
What should I do but stand on my defense,
Strike right, strike left, strike thick and, threefold, slay—
Not all, because the coward priest escapes.
Is it not plausible? Who'll say me nay?
[*Turns to* POMPILIA.]
Then from this child, your child, perhaps our child,
I'll claim estate, can go to no one else.
[*Enter R. fourth man.*]
What, your arms empty?
[*To* POMPILIA.]
So you spoke the truth.
I might have known your pale and watery lips
Would dare not speak a healthy red-blood lie.
So you have hidden him away! Say where!

POMPILIA

No use. I'll tell you nothing, leave my boy
To God, who watches still.

GUIDO

Then let Him watch
What torture I've devised for you to see.
[*Draws dagger.*]
Your mother here, you love her, do you not?
Now watch and see how bravely calm she dies.

VIOLANTE

Nay, kill me if you will, take money, too.
But spare the girl, your wife, who's done no harm.

GUIDO

[*Stabbing her.*]
Your pleading comes too late.
[*To* POMPILIA.]
I thought it kind
To let you watch them die. No trembling yet?
Why, you've more taste for blood than I surmised!
Your father—!
[*Crosses to* PIETRO.]

PIETRO

Mercy for heaven, not for earth!
Leave to confess and save my sinful soul!
Then do your pleasure on the body of me.

GUIDO

Nay, father, soul with body must take its chance.
[*Stabs him. The first man has let* VIOLANTE'S *body slide upon the floor. Almost at once second man does the same with* PIETRO, *and all circle around* POMPILIA *as the scene progresses.*]
[*To* POMPILIA *who has turned away, covering her face with her hands.*]
What! Still no wavering?
[*To the men.*]
Tear down her hands.
Turn her head toward them. If she keeps closed tight
Her eyelids, pull them wide apart!

[*Before the men have a chance to obey,* POMPILIA *drops her hands limp to her side, turns and faces* GUIDO.]

POMPILIA

I watch!

And am not terrified, for they see God.

GUIDO

The same calm look she gave me from the first,
The same too gentle voice. Stupidity
That masks for godliness and won my hate.
[*To* POMPILIA.]
I will be generous. Is there one thing—
Just one, no more—you'd wish before you die?
If so, speak out! Perhaps I'll grant it you.

POMPILIA

I wish I might see Caponsacchi!

GUIDO

What?

You throw that name at me? Then poison worked.
I do believe you love in your wan way.

POMPILIA

Since Caponsacchi came, restored my life,
All has been right. And I have gained my gain,
And death means naught. So far as lies in me,
I give you for your good the life you take.
We shall not meet in this world or the next,
But God is everywhere, and in His face

Is light, so in His shadow healing too.
I'd have you touch the shadow and be healed.

GUIDO

[*Draws back dagger to strike, but slowly his hand drops, and he retreats, as if blinded by a strange light.*]
My hand is palsied, cannot deal the blow.
Yet will I not be cheated of revenge.
Take her, you men, and sink your daggers deep,
The deeper for the coward she has made
Of me, bereft of vengeance all my own.
[*The men surround and stab* POMPILIA, *on floor.*]
[*A knock on door holds them all suddenly motionless. It is repeated.*]
There is no other egress! We are trapped!
They may be many and they may be few.
We'll cut our way out, take then to our heels!

CAPONSACCHI

[*Off stage B. as he knocks the third time.*]
There's something wrong. Go, Conti, call the guard.

GUIDO

[*Triumphantly, draws sword and dagger.*]
It is the priest, delivered to my hand.
Open the door and rush upon him, men.
[*They open door.*]

IST MAN

[*As no one appears.*]
There's no one here.

2ND MAN

Then run while yet there's time.

[*The men rush off B. and to R.* GUIDO *starts to follow, his sword in his right hand, and his dagger in his left.*]

CAPONSACCHI

[*Stepping into doorway from shadows at L. outside, confronts him.*]

You, Guido? Here? What have you done with her?

GUIDO

Why, she is well, is very well—

CAPONSACCHI

You lie!

[*He leaps on* GUIDO'S *sword hand in time.*]

GUIDO

[*Raises left hand with dagger.*]

For she is dead, and you shall join her now.

[CAPONSACCHI'S *right hand shoots up and catches the wrist with dagger, while his left hand still blocks* GUIDO'S *sword arm.*]

CAPONSACCHI

Now, God, I pray thee, give me strength of ten
That I may end this monster now and here—

[*Smashes* GUIDO'S *left hand with dagger down on table. The dagger clatters loose from* GUIDO'S *numbed hand.*]

Down goes the dagger. Now the sword its turn!
[*His right arm enwraps* GUIDO *and catches at* GUIDO'S *sword arm which he has pressed back.*]
Let go the hilt, before I smash each bone
Of hand and wrist, two hands against your one.
[*Sword drops to stage.*]
Now we are even. Fight then for your life.
The life you would not grant to her. That thought
Makes me a Samson, blind with wrath and tears.
Feel you my grip? It tightens round your throat—!
[CONTI *rushes on from B. with guards.*]

CONTI

We are in time.

CAPONSACCHI

[*As guards seize* GUIDO.]
In time? No, no! Too soon!
In time to save him suffer his just due.
[*Guards take* GUIDO *off B.*]

POMPILIA

[*Weakly.*]
My Caponsacchi!

CAPONSACCHI

'Tis her voice. She lives.
This flowerlike body, to frighten at a bruise
You'd think; yet now, stabbed through and through again,
Alive in the ruins.

CONTI

'Tis a miracle.

POMPILIA

My great heart, my strong hand are back again.
It was your voice that woke me back to life.
You are ordained to call and I to come.
But I am dying—

CAPONSACCHI

No, it cannot be!

POMPILIA

[*As he raises her.*]
Oh, lover of my life, oh, soldier saint,
No work begun shall ever pause for death.
Love will be helpful to me more and more,
In the coming course, the new path I must tread.
So wait awhile God's instant men call years,
Meantime hold hard by truth and your great soul.
Do out the duty. Through such souls alone,
God stooping shows sufficient of His light
For us in the dark to rise by. And I—rise.
[*She dies.*]

CAPONSACCHI

[*Rising, head bowed.*]
Oh, great, good, just God! Miserable me!

CURTAIN

EPILOGUE

It is again the Court at the Vatican, Rome. As the Prologue ended with the beginning of CAPONSACCHI'S *story, so the Epilogue begins with the ending of his story.*

At rise of curtain CAPONSACCHI *stands with head bowed.* GUIDO *also has his eyes furtively on the ground, his fingers working. There is a pause before* CAPONSACCHI *begins to speak.*

CAPONSACCHI

But she lives on, speaks here and now through me,
To make the truth apparent, God's own truth,
Lest men believe a lie. Have I been calm?
Shown you Pompilia? Oh, they've killed her, sirs!
Can I be calm? No longer. I have done.
[*Wavers, drops back in chair.*]

TOMMATI

Montini, look to him.

MONTINI

[*With* GIOTTI *in front of* CAPONSACCHI, *leans over him.*]

He faints, no more.

TOMMATI

[*To* GUIDO.]
And now, Count Guido, have you aught to say?

GUIDO

'Tis all a falsehood, all this tale of his,
Made up to save himself, to murder me.
My wife was false, her child not mine but his.
I did God's bidding and man's duty. So
Look you to the rest.
[*Shouts of crowd from without.*]
But as you counsel, list!

VOICES FROM WITHOUT

Hail, Guido. Give us Guido—set him free.

SCALCHI

The mob will say we sacrificed the Count
And thereby screened a scandal in the Church.
Guido condemned, the Canon justified,
Of course delinquents of his cloth go free.

VENTURINI

It is the unwritten law through ages long,
The right of husband to expect true wife.
Take Guido's life, and sapped society shall crash.

GUIDO

You are the Law. 'Tis to the Law I look.

TOMMATI

The Canon's tale is hearsay, much of it.
Law must have proof, not surmise of the fact.

MONTINI

See, sirs. He moves. The blood comes rushing back.

SCALCHI

Perchance he will have more to say.

TOMMATI

We'll see.

CAPONSACCHI

Oh, sirs, I cannot have the lady dead.
That voice immortal—oh, that voice of hers!

VENTURINI

That he did love this woman seems most clear.

TOMMATI

Most patiently we've listened to your tale.
If it be true, where are your witnesses?

CAPONSACCHI

I have none save myself.

VENTURINI

[*To* TOMMATI.]

You see, my lord?

CAPONSACCHI

Gherardi had been here. This being known,
He sudden disappeared a fortnight since.
There's but one man can tell you where he is.
Count Guido's friend, Arezzo's Governor.

TOMMATI

And where is Canon Conti?

CAPONSACCHI

He was called
Back to Arezzo on some trumped-up cause.
And he is dead, poisoned three days ago.
And does that startle you? One murder more
To make black record blacker?

GUIDO

It's not true.

TOMMATI

If you can prove this?

CAPONSACCHI

Nothing can I prove.

VENTURINI

You stand alone, expect us to believe
Just anything you tell us—you, a priest
Discredited by your own story. First:
You were a worldly priest, and, second, this:
You loved a woman, ran away with her—

CAPONSACCHI

Let pass, sir. I have done with being judged.
You say I loved Pompilia, and I say
I never touched her with my finger tip
Except to carry her to the room that morn,
Against my heart, beneath my head bowed low,
As we priests carry the paten. Once again
You say I loved Pompilia. And I say
That I assuredly did bow, was blessed

By the revelation that she brought me. There!
Such is the final fact I fling you, sirs,
To mouth and mumble and misinterpret. There,
The priest's in love! Have it the vulgar way!
Unpriest me, rend the rags of the vestment, do!
Remove me from the midst, no longer priest,
And fit companion for the like of you!

TOMMATI

Take care, sir, how you speak before the Court.

CAPONSACCHI

Forgive me. I was angered, not for self,
But that you should think ill of her. To me
It seems incredible that man could see
And know her, yet could fail to comprehend
The clear perfection of her soul. Could say
Her brow was beautiful, and all the same
Not apprehend the purity that shone
Translucent there, to guide us straight to God.
There ne'er was truth like hers. And now she's dead!
Oh, think, sirs, what you will of me, my part,
But as for her—
[*Flashes out in righteous anger.*]
If any one of you
Dares think that I, in the face of death, her death,
That's in my eyes and ears and brain and heart,
Can lie—!
[*Breaks off. Goes on gently.*]
Sirs, for Pompilia, be advised.
Build churches. Go pray. You will find me there,

I know, if you come. And you will come, I know.
[*With swift change turns to* GUIDO.]
As for her murderer, I saved his wife
Against law. Law has punished me for that.
Against law he has slain her. Deal with him!

GUIDO

He seeks my death, revenge!

CAPONSACCHI

Life would be worse.
If we should go, leave Guido all alone,
Back on the world which soon will find him out,
I think he would be found, as time went by,
Not to die so much as slide out of life,
Pushed by the general horror and common hate,
Lower and lower till, at the doleful end,
Whom is it straining onward still he meets?
What other man deep further in the fate?
Judas, made monstrous by much solitude.
The two are at one now. Let them love their love
That bites and claws like hate, or hate their hate,
That mops and mows and makes as it were love.
Kiss him the kiss, Iscariot. In your turn
Lure him the lure of the letters, Aretine.
There let them grapple, denizens of the dark,
In their one spot out of the ken of God
Or care of man forever and ever more.
[*Cries for* GUIDO *from crowd outside.*]

VENTURINI

Surely we three can steer a middle course

And temper the sharp justice of our mind
With the mild mercy of our kinder heart.

TOMMATI

The Court need not condemn nor yet acquit.

SCALCHI

We scarce need go the length to end his life,
Especially when Rome takes up his cause.

CAPONSACCHI

Now, sirs, but sirs no more, you cowards all!
You, who by cowardice before prepared
Her death, and now would loose her murderer!

TOMMATI

[*Rising.*]
Seize, hold him fast, bind him and stop his mouth.
The Court will hear no more of sacrilege.
The evidence obtained will be transcribed
And, with our recommendings, forwarded
Prompt to His Holiness, the Pope.

CAPONSACCHI

[*Struggling with* MONTINI.]
Take not
Away the last faith I have left. The Pope!
Will he be coward too?

SCALCHI

See—he blasphemes!

CAPONSACCHI

Or will he with his righteous word speak truth?
To teach the coward world? I cry for truth!
[*The curtains part at back and the* POPE *is seen sitting in the recess. In dazed surprise all in the court room kneel. Slowly the* POPE *comes down.*]

POPE

Rise up, my judges. I your wisdom wish.
What do you recommend decision be?

TOMMATI

We lean to mercy, sir, as does all Rome.
We plead compassion, beg you to pronounce.

POPE

I will, sirs, since, through God, the truth is plain.
I forthwith think, speak, act in place of Him.
The sentence: "On receipt of this command
Acquaint Count Guido and his fellows four
They die to-morrow. Set a scaffold up,
Not in the place where die the common sort,
But since the man is noble, and his peers
By predilection haunt the people's square,
There let him be beheaded in the midst
And his companions hanged on either side.
Let there be prayer incessant for the five."
[GUIDO *drops to the floor in a faint. The* POPE *comes down to where* GUIDO *lies, looks down upon him compassionately.*]
For the main criminal I have no hope,

Except the truth be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.
Else I avert my face, nor follow him
Into that sad, obscure, sequestered state
Where God unmakes but to remake the soul
He else made first in vain, which must not be.
Enough, for I may die this very night,
And how should I dare die, this man let live?
[*A wave of his hand indicates their office to the* GUARDS. GIOTTI *and* MELCHIOR *step forward, lift up* GUIDO.]

GUIDO

I lied. I do confess. I plead for grace.
The priest was true, my wife was true, all true.
[*Struggling, breaks away and crosses to* POPE, *kisses hem of his robe.*]
Oh, save me notwithstanding! Life is all.
I was just stark mad. Let the madman live.
Press on as many chains as you please to pile
But let me live!
[*The guards seize him again.*]
The headsman! Oh, I see
The horrid knife, the swift descending blow!
[*Cries out in mad horror as they drag him off to R.*]
Oh, Judges! Cardinals! Christ! Maria! God!—
Pompilia! Will you let them murder me?
[*Exit, dragged by guards. The Court remains as before. From off stage softly comes the sound of the organ heard in Prologue.*]

POPE

Next I pronounce Pompilia, first to last,
Perfect in whiteness, marvel of a soul.
If there be any virtue, any praise,
Then will this woman-child have proved earth's flower,
She holds up to the softened gaze of God.
[*Crosses to* CAPONSACCHI, *who still kneels.*]
And you, my valiant warrior priest, well done!
[*Turns to Judges.*]
Now, Judges, let this man example be.
Right, not renown; courage before acclaim;
Justice beyond the law; God above men.
[*With a wave of hand he dismisses them, and judges and guards exeunt. The afternoon light through the window shines on* CAPONSACCHI *as he kneels. The music of the organ has increased, a stately, triumphant Te Deum. The* POPE *turns to* CAPONSACCHI.]
Would I might comfort thee! New courage find!
Work, be unhappy, but bear life, my son.
As you led her so others shall you lead,
Make the world better, show in God's behalf
That broad brow that reverberates the truth,
And flash the word God gave you back to man.
[*With sign of the cross, exit slowly at left.*]

CAPONSACCHI

[*Prays as he kneels.*]
I mean to do my duty and live long,
Meet straight the fate Thou hast prepared for me,

To try to mold the golden ring of truth,
Her truth, Thy truth, to reach through her to Thee,
So, striving, wait Thy "instant men call years,
Do out the duty."

CURTAIN FALLS

AFTERWORD

During the course of my association with the theater, I have collaborated in the making of several plays and have been privileged to watch the making of many others; yet, though I am fairly familiar with the problems of collaborative craftsmanship, I have never known or heard of any other play whose genesis was so extraordinary as that of "Caponsacchi."

An actor-manager receives innumerable letters from people he has never met. Rarely are these unsolicited communications worthy of attention, even though scores of them beseech him to grant engagements to talented young women, fresh from college, who are destined in a few seasons to become greater than Duse. Now and then, however, a letter from an unknown correspondent stabs the mind with an idea.

Half a dozen years ago, or thereabouts, Mr. Walter Hampden received a letter from Miss Rose A. Palmer, of Washington, D. C., suggesting that the character of Giuseppe Caponsacchi would make an excellent acting part for him, if a play could possibly be fashioned from the material contained in Robert Browning's monumental epic poem, "The Ring and the Book." Miss Palmer, it appeared, was an enthusiastic student of Browning. She accompanied her letter with a series

of well-chosen excerpts from the poem, arranged roughly into scenes. Later she submitted an even fuller script.

It happened that Mr. Hampden, at that time, had never read "The Ring and the Book"—a fact which is easily explicable, since most of us, appalled by the poem's extraordinary length, are accustomed to postpone the reading of it until some season of hypothetical leisure which actually never comes; but he knew that his brother-in-law, Mr. Arthur Goodrich, had been an ardent lover of Browning ever since his undergraduate days at Wesleyan, and had read and reread the entire epic many times. Consequently, instead of tossing Miss Palmer's letter into the scrap basket, he tossed it into the hands of Mr. Goodrich and asked him for advice.

If Mr. Hampden, on this occasion, had asked me for advice instead of asking Mr. Goodrich, Miss Palmer's letter would indubitably have been doomed to its alternative destination. Though Browning has created a greater number of great dramatic characters than any other English poet subsequent to Shakespeare, he never succeeded in his lifetime in writing a single successful play, despite the fact that he tried to write practicable pieces for the theater more than half a dozen times. Of the murder story which forms the basis for "The Ring and the Book," a disinterested critic might reasonably have remarked—in the poet's own words—that "Robert Browning, you writer of plays, here's a subject made to your hand!" Yet Browning himself had deliberately chosen not to dramatize this subject: he

must, therefore, have regarded the technical difficulties as insuperable: and who of us should dare to rush in where, apparently, the poet himself had feared to tread?

This would have been my argument; but fortunately, on this occasion, Mr. Hampden did not consult me, but consulted Mr. Goodrich instead. Mr. Goodrich reported that Miss Palmer's idea was not impracticable. Furthermore, he agreed, himself, to undertake the heavy task of turning the most intricate epic poem ever written into a poetic play. Mr. Goodrich stipulated only one condition. Since, in so complicated a task, unity of purpose was the first essential, he asked that he be given a free hand in planning and writing the play. This arrangement was accepted readily by Miss Palmer and by Mr. Hampden. For the faults and for the merits of the text, therefore, considered both as a play and as a poem, Mr. Goodrich is responsible.

At the time when Arthur Goodrich undertook this task, he had already established himself as a successful novelist and playwright; but he had never made any pretension of being a poet, and—so far as I remember—he had published only a few short bits of verse. He had written such popular novels as *The Balance of Power, Gleam o' Dawn, The Lady Without Jewels, The Yardstick Man, The Man With an Honest Face,* and *The Sign of Freedom;* and he had achieved a reputation for technical adroitness in the theater with such clever and popular compositions as "Yes or No" and "So This Is London"; but these achievements, worthy as they were, scarcely seemed to nominate him for dis-

tinction as a proponent of poetic drama. Yet, with
out apparent hesitance, he accepted an assignment t
collaborate in the composition of a practicable pla
with one of the greatest poets of all time, Rober
Browning.

For this assignment meant nothing less than that
It demanded a true collaboration between the autho
of "So This Is London" and the mighty man whc
heaped with honors, has lain buried in the Poets' Cor
ner of Westminster Abbey since 1889. Consider, fo
a moment, the conditions of this unprecedented project
Mr. Goodrich, whenever confronted with a knotty prob
lem, could not consult with his fellow-author; yet h
was bound—for practical reasons as well as conscien
tious reasons—to discover a solution which might b
approvable by his august collaborator.

The technical difficulties of the task would hav
daunted any other dramatist that I have ever beer
privileged to meet. In the first place, Browning hac
retold his intricate and puzzling seventeenth centur
murder story from a dozen different points of view: th
opportunity for observing the material under the chang
ing lights of such a psychological kaleidoscope had of
fered him, indeed, the basic project for his poem. But
in the theater, a story must be told unfalteringly fron
a single point of view. Since Mr. Hampden was pre
destined to appear in the part of Caponsacchi, the poin
of view to be selected by the dramatist was, obviously
that of the warrior-priest, the soldier-saint, who occu
pies far less of Browning's attention, in his epic render

ing, than the villain of the story, Guido Franceschini. To emphasize the selection of Caponsacchi's point of view, Mr. Goodrich decided to begin and end his play with a session of the final trial before the Papal court, and to present the main incidents in the narrative as so many vivid illustrations of a continuous speech delivered by Caponsacchi for the purpose of justifying both his motives and his actions before the judgment of the ultimate tribunal.

To reread the twenty thousand lines of "The Ring and the Book"—I admit that I have never counted them—for the purpose of picking out the essentials of the underlying story, was, in itself, no trifling task; and to construct this underlying story in dramaturgic terms, and also to present it unwaveringly from a single point of view, was a problem that might easily have defeated any dramatist of common caliber. But, after the scenario was planned, it then became necessary for the living collaborator to *write* the whole play, not only in verse but also in poetry, and in poetry, moreover, which might seem to be not utterly unworthy of the dead collaborator.

I am willing to admit that any practiced man of letters may write blank verse as easily as prose; but to write blank verse that shall sound like Browning's without ever seeming to parody the pronounced mannerisms of that extraordinary poet is a task that calls for extraordinary nicety of ear. Mr. Goodrich, having planned his play, was required not merely to write it in blank verse, but to write it—beyond the carping of

auricular criticism—in Browning's blank verse, which, as every scholar knows, stands apart from the tradition bequeathed from Milton, through Tennyson, to Stephen Phillips. It is easy enough to imitate Browning when the purpose is merely to raise an appreciative laugh from the literate; but to imitate Browning without parody is a task that calls for special and peculiar delicacy.

Mr. Goodrich's first attempt at a dramatization of "The Ring and the Book" was tried out by Mr. Hampden, under the working-title of "The Ring of Truth," in Indianapolis in the spring of 1923. At that time the piece was very much too long, and the final curtain was not rung down until long after midnight. My own first acquaintance with the piece began, two or three weeks later, in Buffalo, when Mr. Hampden presented it, in the great open spaces of the enormous Teck Theater, before an audience composed mainly of Mr. Goodrich and myself. By all of the ordinary portents of the theater, the piece appeared to be a failure; but, somehow or other, it managed to administer to my spinal column an unexpected kick, and I predicted, then and there, the probability of a successful play. The main trouble, at the moment, with the piece was that Caponsacchi, the character interpreted by Mr. Hampden, was, while developed well beyond his dramatic importance in the poem, scarcely important enough. Mr. Goodrich, in his desire to keep faith with his illustrious collaborator, had handed the play —as we say in the theater—to Guido, and had not

sufficiently developed the pretentions of the soldier-saint to the sympathies of an audience antecedently unprejudiced.

In those days in Buffalo, in 1923, when I was sitting side by side with Arthur Goodrich in the almost empty auditorium of the Teck Theater and wondering about the reactions of a possible future audience to this uncompleted play, I felt impelled, every now and then, to nudge my companion with a smothered remark that Robert Browning was a great poet after all—only to be met with the modest and amused reply, "That isn't Browning: it's Goodrich, all of it." And, on other occasions, when I felt constrained to say, "Arthur, we can't get by with that: it's too awkward: the verse is really bad," Mr. Goodrich would smile beatifically and remark, "That's Browning, every word of it."

I doubt if there are so many as one hundred complete lines of Browning's in the final text of "Caponsacchi"; yet Mr. Goodrich has succeeded in baffling his listeners so easily that most of us, including the highest specialists in the study of Browning, would be hard pressed if we were required to bet our money on the nice question of where Browning leaves off and Goodrich begins. Mr. Goodrich, apparently, has so completely drenched and steeped himself in the spirit and the atmosphere of Browning that he has enabled himself to write the play of "Caponsacchi" with the full connivance and approval of the poet.

After the apparently unpropitious try-out of "The Ring of Truth" in Indianapolis and in Buffalo, circum-

stances granted Mr. Goodrich three years in which to improve his composition or to renounce his interest in the attempt. The enormous success of Mr. Hampden's revival of "Cyrano de Bergerac" in the season of 1923-1924 crowded all his other projects off the stage; and the next season, as a sort of gift to the public which had patronized his "Cyrano," Mr. Hampden decided to exhibit his "Othello" to New York. A third season was occupied by Mr. Hampden's revivals of other Shakespearian plays at his own theater, including "Hamlet" and "The Merchant of Venice," with Miss Ethel Barrymore as Ophelia and as Portia.

Yet, as the years went by, Mr. Goodrich worked on from time to time, at his Browning play, rebuilding, discarding, rewriting. He was willing, with long patience, to await his hour. He knew all the time that if the piece succeeded, the credit would go to Robert Browning; and that, if it failed, the discredit would go to Arthur Goodrich.

But Arthur Goodrich has not failed. At the moment when this afterword is written, "Caponsacchi" is running to excellent business in its fourth month on Broadway and bids fair to be remembered as one of the outstanding theatrical successes of the season.

For the privilege of witnessing this ennobling and poetic play, we are indebted to the disinterested endeavors of an author who deliberately sacrificed an obvious opportunity to make money by repeating such projects as that of his exceedingly successful play, "So This Is London," for the privilege of following the gleam and

trying to do what Robert Browning might have tried to do, if Browning's paths had crossed with those of Walter Hampden instead of those of William Charles Macready.

Now that "Caponsacchi" has been accepted and acclaimed by the ticket-buying public of New York, it is easy enough for any of us to assert that Browning was, potentially, a great dramatic poet; but we must also remember that Arthur Goodrich is the first dramatist in history who has ever made an actual success upon the stage of any project conceived by Robert Browning; and that, in order to achieve this result, Mr. Goodrich has been forced to turn himself into a poet whose lines are indistinguishable by a layman from those that were veritably written by the greatest of the great Victorians.

CLAYTON HAMILTON.

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